INSTRUCTOR PRESENCE IN ONLINE EDUCATION: AN ANALYSIS OF STUDENT PERCEPTIONS AND PERFORMANCE

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To Jacque, Scarlett, and Gray

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INSTRUCTOR PRESENCE IN ONLINE EDUCATION: AN ANALYSIS OF STUDENT PERCEPTIONS AND PERFORMANCE

The purpose of this study was to research ways and methods that faculty establish instructor presence in an online learning environment in higher education, and how those methods impact students in these learning environments. More specifically, this study analyzed instructor presence by seeking answers to the following question:

- What online instructional practices do students perceive as valuable to their learning?

This study took place at a small, Catholic, liberal arts southeastern university. This study focused only on students enrolled in the distance education program that is offered online. Although some of the students in the online program were traditional college-aged, the majority of them were non-traditional students, many of whom work full-time and balance their school responsibilities with work and family obligations. The University's online program attracts a large number of active or former military students, military spouses, and first-generation college students.

The primary data source for the study was a survey that focused on indicators of instructor presence. The instructor presence indicators were compiled primarily from instruments designed to measure instructor presence in online courses and many of the indicators were drawn from the social and teaching presence scales of the Community of Inquiry (COI) instrument by Garrison, Anderson, and Archer (2000). Other indicators were developed from the cognitive presence scale and were centered on the types of actions an instructor might take to

maintain these conditions. The overall intent was to create a broad, yet inclusive list of the type of actions an instructor would typically take in designing, delivering, and monitoring an online course (Sheridan & Kelly, 2010).

Results suggested that students perceived the instructional practice of making course requirements clear as valuable. Students reported that they also perceived the instructional practice of instructors providing timely communication to students' questions/concerns as valuable. Participants also recognized that timely feedback on assignments and projects was valuable to student learning. Students also perceived the instructional practice of creating a course that was easy to navigate as valuable. While some students reported the use of discussion forums to be perceived as valuable, this practice was not reported to be perceived as valuable as the other instructional practices. The same was true for establishing a sense of community in an online course as well as engaging in a real time synchronous chat sessions. This study has both practical and theoretical implications in online course design, distance education delivery, and online pedagogy. Recommendations for the program under study were also provided.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

The landscape of higher education is constantly adapting as the needs of the students that colleges and universities serve change. Present reality is that the cost of a traditional, first-time, full-time freshman, face-to-face program is extremely high for both the students to attend and the institutions to provide. In addition to being costly, a face-to-face delivery does not accommodate non-traditional students who are working full-time or may have family obligations. The number of non-traditional age students seeking an education has grown in recent years and all signs point to its continued growth (Allen & Seamen, 2016). The fact is that physically coming to campus is simply not an option for many of these students. To better serve potential students, many universities have turned to a more flexible mode of delivery and created online learning programs.

The number of online learning programs continues to increase every year and it does not appear that trend is going to stop anytime soon (Allen & Seaman, 2016). Colleges and universities have developed a number of different online opportunities of which students take advantage. Some schools have developed entire degree programs online where students can earn credits toward an Associate's, Bachelor's, Master's, or even a Doctoral degree online. Other schools have created courses where students can earn badges or other types of certificates for the classes they complete as opposed to receiving credit or a degree. Some institutions have created programs that students can take just for the sake of learning. Many of these are offered via a Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC) and are often offered for free or at a highly reduced cost versus a traditional credit earning course.

Regardless of the type of online program an institution decides to offer, it seems obvious that some online presence is necessary for an institution of higher learning to remain relevant and fiscally viable. To be an attractive option for potential students some type of online option is necessary, not only to attract potential students, but also to retain the ones a school enrolls. In a world of digital natives wielding smartphones, the time for ubiquitous learning in an online space is now.

Problem Statement

The number of students pursuing at least part of an academic degree online has continued to rise over the last decade (Allen & Seaman, 2016). Of the 20.6 million students enrolled in institutions of higher learning in the fall of 2010, 6.7 million were enrolled in an online course, and increase of 570,000 students (Allen & Seaman, 2013). The growth rate for online enrollment from 2003 to 2013 was 9.3 percent leading to the proportion of students taking at least one online course to be 32.0 percent which is an all-time high in that category (Allen & Seaman, 2013).

And while the number of students pursuing online education has continued to rise, so too have the number of online programs to serve those students (Allen & Seaman, 2016). For institutions that offer some form of online learning, 77.1% felt that it was critical to their long-term strategic planning in 2015 (Allen & Seaman, 2016). All areas of higher education are moving towards increased presences in the online education market. Public, private, for-profit all show continued grow in the development of online programs. Public institutions now control the largest portion of distance education students with 72.7% of the undergraduate population in 2015 (Allen & Seaman, 2016).

Although this is certainly beneficial to students seeking numerous options, growth at this volume and pace is not exempt from some problems. First, many schools launched online programs just to keep pace with rival institutions or because that is what a speaker said at the last conference their administration attended. Why is this a problem? Well, many institutions launched full speed ahead with little insight or proper planning. The result could be a program that is not well thought out or that has policies that are based on expediency rather than informed data.

A second challenge with the growth of online programs deals with quality control and assessment. Anyone who has ever been on a team responsible for preparing for reaffirmation review by a regional accreditor will understand the importance of sound academic policies and procedures. Many institutions did not plan how they would assess and report on online programs. One of the fundamental issues is course equivalency between online and on campus. How does an institution ensure that the two deliveries are comparable? Are they using common assignments using standardized rubrics? Is someone tracking and documenting student learning outcomes at both the course and program level? A lack of this type of data can cause serious issues in the reporting of the quality of academic programs and specific courses.

The third challenge deals primarily with online pedagogy. Many instructors who had taught for years in a traditional brick and mortar, face-to-face setting were either given the opportunity to, or in some cases, forced to teach at least a portion of their teaching load online. Although many institutions tried to find appropriate professional development for faculty making the shift, not all were successful. To further complicate matters, many faculty members did not recognize the need for additional training. Many adopted a "teaching is teaching" philosophy.

The reality is that the two deliveries are quite different and require different approaches and pedagogical techniques.

A fourth challenge is tied directly to the increase in online programs. The fact that students now have so many options to pursue their education they have the ability to be highly selective. That puts additional pressure on colleges and universities to develop and promote sound educational programs that are of the highest quality. It also puts the burden on all involved to develop and maintain programs that are marketable to students who have the ability to be very particular when it comes to where they will choose to pursue their degree and spend their educational dollars.

At the University examined in this study, there are some additional factors justifying the need for this study. First, when the program was first launched six years ago, it was the only CSWE accredited Bachelor's of Social Work completion program available fully online. Being the only accredited program made the recruitment and retention of students a fairly simple and straightforward task. Unfortunately now the current landscape of online education, specifically in the area of BSW programs there is considerable competition. If students do not like one or more aspects of the University's program, they have options to go elsewhere. This has caused significant drops in current as well as projected enrollments in the online program.

Another issue facing the institution examined in this study is program delivery. The current delivery system was derived out of necessity to get in the market as quickly as possible so to not miss the opportunity to establish an online footprint. So, many of the decisions regarding the online program were based on expediency as opposed to well thought out, consistent, and sustainable factors. The result is now the University is faced with some difficult decisions on how to secure a necessary market share in a market that is becoming saturated with

competition while providing an educational experience that is pedagogically sound, based on online best practices, in line with what students expect and marketable to an ever changing population.

One of the biggest issues at the institution especially within the last year has been in the area of synchronous delivery. Since the program's inception it has required an element of synchronous learning in every course. Called a "chat session" each course has a scheduled time during the week where students and the instructor come together and meet in real time via a web conferencing platform. Instructors and students are able to use microphones to share audio and webcams to broadcast video as they interact, ask questions, and communicate about course material.

From a faculty perspective, this one instructional practice had become synonymous with a quality learning experience. The reality is it became far more than that. The chat sessions became the identity of the University's online program. So, when the enrollment office indicated to University administration that a high percentage of students stopped pursuing enrolling at the Institution based on this one requirement, and conversations began about perhaps adjusting the requirement of synchronous chat, there were some very strong feelings around the issue. Those strong feelings moved into some rather heated discussions and the result has been a tense and divided campus over the last several semesters.

After much debate about synchronous versus asynchronous learning and how that impacts the University's online program and the students it serves, it led to a broader question: what does quality online education look like? What constitutes sound teaching in the online space? What techniques are effective? Which are not? How do we know? Is there data available that would help university administrators create, implement, and evaluate policies to

ensure the online programs being offered are at a high quality consistent with their on-campus counterparts?

Description of Study

The purpose of this study was to research ways and methods that faculty establish instructor presence in an online learning environment in higher education. And, how those methods impact students in these learning environments. More specifically, this study analyzed instructor presence by seeking answers to the following question:

- What online instructional practices do students perceive as valuable to their learning?

This study took place at a small, Catholic, liberal arts, southeastern university. At the time of this study the University's enrollment was approximately 1,300 students. There are several different coursework deliveries that the University offers. First, there is a traditional face-to-face method where students come to campus and take classes with a faculty member. Second, there is an online program that uses both synchronous and asynchronous forms of interaction to facilitate the learning experience. Examples of each will be elaborated on later on in this paper. A third delivery format is dual credit. In this delivery, students are concurrently enrolled in the course for credit at The University as well as his or her high school. In this study, only the online programs were considered. At The University, the online program has approximately 500 students enrolled in courses and pursuing a degree. That figure is roughly the same number of students that the traditional, on-ground, face-to-face program serves making it a key component of the mission of the institution.

The primary source of data to address the research question was a survey. A much more detailed description of the survey instrument itself will be included later in this document, including the process used to select this particular questionnaire and a rationale for why it was

chosen. Some of the questions on the survey sought collect demographics, such as age and background information. Other questions focused on students' overall experience in the program paying special attention to elements such as synchronous communication, asynchronous communication, levels of social presence, perceived effectiveness, overall satisfaction, academic advancement, attitudes, preferences, instructional practices and strategies.

Significance of the Study

This study has a number of implications on a broad range of levels. At the course level, the results of this study have practical implications on the course design process. From preparing a syllabus to creating a class schedule, instructors can use the insights provided in this study to make informed decisions on how they structure their course. They can also use it to make policy and procedure decisions that students identify as important and most satisfactory. For example, what method of communication is best for online students? Online office hours, phone calls, and email are typically part of an online instructor's syllabus; however, which of these do students identify as the best method of communication with an instructor? Also, what are the expectations on the timeliness and amount of feedback an instructor shares with students?

The results of this study are also relevant for those considering creating an online program or those currently serving in an administrative capacity of an existing program. Many programs have been created as a reaction to the boom in online education. Many administrators of institutions were not afforded the luxury of long periods of time to deliberate about the widespread effects that policy decisions regarding these programs would have. The results of this study can be used by university administrators to make data-driven decisions in either creating a brand new online program or revaluating existing programs.

Definition of Terms

The following section provides definitions to provide clarification for terms used in this study:

1. *Instructor presence* – includes each of the presences represented in the Community of Inquiry (COI), social presence, cognitive presence, and teaching presence (Dennen, 2007; Hodges, & Forest Cowan, 2012; Jaggars, Edgecombe, & Stacey, 2013); Wisneki et al., 2015).
2. *Teaching presence* – "the design, facilitation, and direction of cognitive and social processes for the purpose of realizing personally meaningful and educationally worthwhile learning outcomes" (Anderson, Rourke, Garrison, & Archer, 2001, p. 5) which includes the collection, grouping, and presentation of course content (Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2000).
3. *Social presence* – The ability for participants in the COI to project personal characteristics and make purposeful relationships (Garrison et al, 2007) which include social context, online communication, interactivity as well as intimacy (physical proximity) and immediacy (psychological distance) (Tu & McIssac, 2002) all which contribute to participants sense of connectedness to one another (Richardson et al, 2015) and an overall sense of community within a learning experience.
4. *Cognitive presence* – An inquiry-based learning approach that has participants work collaboratively and reflect thoughtfully on the process after investigating a problem, identifying possible solutions, resolving the problem, and confirming comprehension of learning (Garrison, 2007; Garrison et al, 2000).
5. *Community of Inquiry (COI)* – Originally developed to investigate the use of computer-mediated communication (CMC) it is a framework that identifies three core elements (teaching presence, cognitive presence, and social presence) that work both

independently and collaboratively and are all necessary for a successful and meaningful educational experience (Garrison et al, 2000).

6. *Learning* – A persistent change that may not be immediately evident in human performance or performance potential (Driscoll, 2005).
7. *Online learning* – Using the Internet to access educational resources such as course content and interacting with those resources as well as the instructor and other learners to gain knowledge, construct personal meaning, and grow from the educational experience (Anderson, 2008).
8. *Asynchronous online learning* – An online communications medium that allows for learners to exchange information and ideas regardless of their physical proximity to one another or the time of day (Ocker & Yaverbaum, 1999).
9. *Synchronous online learning* – Learning that is occurring completely online via real-time instruction (Park & Bonk, 2007).
10. *Sense of community* – a sense of belonging and connectedness in a learning environment between individuals that is built around four primary dimensions: trust, spirit, interaction, and commonality of expectations and goals (Rovai, 2002).
11. *Engagement* – a psychological investment in the process toward learning, or understanding specifically in the areas of interest, attention, and effort students spend on the work of learning (Klem, & Connell, 2004).
12. *Motivation* – derived from the word *movere*, a Latin verb which literally translates "to move," it involves what gets people to move. In the case of a learning experience, it refers to what drives students to complete course readings, study for assessments, attend classes, collaborate with peers, and work hard toward the learning goals (Pintrich, 2003).

13. *Learning management system (LMS)* – sometimes known as a Course Management System (CMS) or Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), a software e-learning platform that allows users to create, deliver, and manage web-based content for courses; add online elements to traditional courses to supplement current in-class instruction; and facilitate and deliver courses completely online. It allows learners to communicate both synchronously and asynchronously, access course content, collaborate in group activities, and submit assignments and take assessments.
14. *Indicators of instructor presence* – Instructional strategies, behaviors, actions, and interactions an instructor makes or employs while teaching an online course or interacting with an online student or group of students (Richardson et al, 2015).
15. *Perceived learning*– a participant's sense that the actions or experiences in a learning environment directly contribute to learning taking place (Richardson & Swan, 2003).
16. *Perceived satisfaction* – A participant's sense that the actions or experiences in a learning environment positively affect contentment with his or her own experience (Richardson & Swan, 2003)
17. *Perceived value* – A participant's sense that the actions or experiences in a learning environment are practical, functional, convenient, constructive, beneficial, advantageous, helpful, worthwhile, or productive.

Organization of Remaining Chapters

This dissertation is organized into five different chapters. Chapter One provided an introduction to the study, a problem statement, a description of the study, an explanation about the significance of the study, and definitions of important terms related to the study. The second chapter provides a more detailed overview of the research in the areas of the COI

framework, instructor presence, cognitive presence, social presence, and teaching presence. Chapter Three provides the main research question driving the study, introduces the participants of the study and provides a detailed description of the setting for the study. Chapter Three also explains the research design, data sources, and details about the procedure and data analysis. Chapter Four describes the results from the study as evidenced in the survey responses. Chapter Five includes a discussion of the results, implications of this research, limitations of the study, and suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter is focused on key areas of instructor presence such as the origins of instructor presence, how it has been characterized and understood over time, related concepts in the literature, and how those concepts have helped to shape and develop the collective understanding of instructor presence. In addition, this chapter discusses three specific areas of online learning experiences to see what impact instructor presence has, if any: perceived effectiveness, overall satisfaction, and performance. This chapter also examines specific instructional practices teachers engage in to establish instructor presence in online course settings. Finally, this paper poses conclusions and implications for future consideration.

Literature Review

Historical Context: The Community of Inquiry Framework

To understand the current application of the term instructor presence it is important to look at the historical context surrounding the concept and its background. The origins of teaching presence as it applies to distance education can be traced to the development of the COI framework which was developed specifically to further investigate the use of CMC (Garrison, et al, 2000). One of the benefits of this form of delivery is the convenience it provides through the ability to deliver educational learning experiences to students anytime, anywhere. The COI framework identifies three core elements that are essential for a successful learning experience: social presence, cognitive presence, and teaching presence. In the COI framework, cognitive presence pertains to how learners construct knowledge through communication, social presence involves learners projecting themselves as real people through various interactions, and teaching

presence involves both the design and facilitation of the learning experience (Garrison et al, 2000).

To further address the nature of instructor presence it is necessary to look at each of the three elements of the COI framework independently as well as understand the various relationships between the presences as evidenced in the literature. Cognitive presence involves inquiry-based learning through a number of phases including identifying a problem, gathering knowledge, integrating ideas and possible solutions, and attempting to solve the problem (Garrison, Cleveland-Innes, & Fung, 2010). Another way to articulate this is Garrison's (2007) definition of cognitive presence as "the exploration, construction, resolution and confirmation of understanding through collaboration and reflection in a community of inquiry" (p. 65). Much of the early research on cognitive presence (Garrison, 2007; Garrison et al, 2000; Garrison, & Cleveland-Innes, 2005) was primarily geared at how students progressed from one phase to the next. Cognitive presence has been operationally defined in terms of four categories with associated indicators: 1. Triggering event (sense of puzzlement), 2. Exploration (information exchange), 3. Integration (connecting ideas), 4. Resolution (apply new ideas) (Garrison, 2005).

Social presence involves sharing personal characteristics with others in the learning experience that gives others the sense they are interacting with another authentic individual (Garrison et al, 2000). Others have categorized it as a sense of community or feeling of connection with others that learners feel during the learning experience (Aragon, 2003; Picciano, 2002; Shutt, Allen, & Laumakis, 2009; Tu & McIssac, 2002; Wise, Chang, Duffy, & del Valle, 2004). Richardson and Swan (2003) refer to the social presence in mediated instruction as the degree someone is perceived as real. Others have described social presence as a feeling that communications are with an actual person as opposed to an impersonal object (Baker, 2010).

The main goal of social presence is to establish a level of comfort between the students and the instructor because a lack of comfort also leads to a level of dissatisfaction or a lack of fulfillment by participants (Aragon, 2003). Yet another interpretation of social presence is the degree to which a person is aware of others in an interaction and the subsequent appreciation of the interpersonal relationship(s) formed (Tu & McIsaac, 2002). "The degree of social presence is based on the characteristics of the medium and the user's perception" (Tu & McIsaac, 2002, p. 133).

Tu and McIssac's (2002) work draws on a different branch of literature: communication studies. They identify two main concepts of social presence established from this literature: intimacy and immediacy. Intimacy in this sense refers to actions such as maintaining eye contact and physical proximity. Immediacy refers to the psychological distance between the two parties conversing (Tu & McIsaac, 2002). They also indicate three dimensions of social presence: social context, online communication, and interactivity. Social context involves task types and privacy. "Online communication is concerned with the attributes of the language used online and the applications of online language" (Tu & McIsaac, 2002, p. 135). Interactivity includes the types of activities participants engage in, communication styles used, as well as immediacy (Tu & McIsaac, 2002).

Teaching presence as identified in the COI framework has two primary functions. The first involves course design that includes the selection of resources and the development of learning activities and assessment. The second function is course facilitation. Although both functions are typically the primary responsibility of the instructor, other members in the learning community may share in these responsibilities throughout the learning experience (Garrison et al, 2000). Building on the work of Garrison et al., (2000) Anderson, Rourke, Garrison, & Archer

(2001) constructed a classification of teaching presence consisting of three characteristics: design and organization, facilitating discourse, and direct instruction. They define teaching presence "as the design, facilitation, and direction of cognitive and social processes for the purpose of realizing personally meaningful and educationally worthwhile learning outcomes" (Anderson et al, 2001, p. 5). In many instances, however, direct instruction is most commonly associated with teaching presence and includes characteristics of instructional leadership and content knowledge, feedback and assessment of student performance (Wisneki, Ozogul, & Bichelmeyer, 2015).

According to Lehman (2006) "There is no generally accepted theory of presence" (p. 13). Researchers in the areas of distance education, philosophy, communication, computer science, and psychology have all studied the notion of presence. Within the area of distance education literature, the terms teaching or teacher presence have been used almost synonymously with instructor presence (Ekmekci, 2013; Lear, Isernhagen, LaCost, & King, 2009; Sheridan, & Kelly, 2010). However another branch of the literature seems to categorize the term instructor presence to include each of the presences in the COI framework (Hodges & Cowan, 2012; Dennen, 2007; Wisneki et al., 2015; Jaggars, Edgecombe, & Stacey, 2013). This paper will utilize this all-encompassing vantage point.

Lehman (2006) described "presence" as a sense of authenticity within a moment. According to Dennen (2007), "The notion of presence, then, becomes not only a matter of how an instructor positions herself, but also of how learners position her and how she accepts the positions they ascribe to her" (p. 96). According to Stone and Chapman (2006). "Instructor presence is a dynamic process, conceptualized at the earliest stages of the instructional design process, and integrated into the course learning environment (p.1371). It requires planning and foresight from

the very beginning of the course development stage. Others have categorized instructor presence as the intersection between social presence and teaching presence (Richardson et al., 2015).

Indicators of Instructor Presence

There are a number of ways instructors can create presence in an educational experience provided via distance. Since instructors in online courses are often not physically visible to the learners, instructor presence is demonstrated through course design, knowledge of course content, and both synchronous and asynchronous forms of communication (Hrastinski, 2008; Kassinger, 2004; Lear et al, 2009; Mandernach, Forrest, Babutzke, & Manker, 2009; McBrien, Cheng, & Jones, 2009; Morgan, 2011). Another way of establishing instructor presence is timely communication and feedback for students (Fredericksen, Pickett, Shea, Pelz, & Swan, 2000; Ladyshewsky, 2013; Lear et al., 2009; Piccano, 2002; Stone, & Chapman, 2006). An additional way instructors can increase presence is by facilitating productive discourse. Examples of this include identifying areas of agreement and disagreement, helping reach a consensus, acknowledging and encouraging student contributions, setting the climate, bringing in participants, and establishing the climate for learning (Ladyshewsky, 2013). Other strategies for increasing instructor presence include sharing firsthand experiences or personal stories, incorporating humor, supporting or agreeing with an idea, complimenting another's idea, alluding to physical presence, addressing students by name, providing alternatives to formal titles in addressing the teacher, and using emoticons (Aragon, 2003; Wise et al., 2004).

Indicators of Satisfaction

Richardson and Swan (2003) found that students indicating high levels of social presence reported being satisfied overall with their instructor signifying a correlation with social presence and satisfaction. Garrison, Cleveland-Innes, and Fung (2010) found that the three presences are

interconnected, more specifically that teaching presence has significant impact on students' perceptions of both social presence and cognitive presence. Akyol and Garrison (2014) found that teaching presence, cognitive presence, and social presence have a significant correlation with overall student satisfaction. Russo and Benson (2005) indicated that instructor presence was strongly related to both social presence and cognitive presence; however, it was also noted that the presence of other students in the class had a stronger correlation than with the instructor. Hostetter and Busch (2006) found that students' perceptions of social presence had a strong correlation to satisfaction.

Another indicator of satisfaction relates to the interactions between the instructor and students. A study on interactive instruction found that instructor's feedback was the most critical factor in terms of satisfaction (Lee & Rha, 2009). Shea, Li, and Pickett (2006) indicated that a strong sense of teaching presence, specifically clear communication, had a strong relationship to student satisfaction. LaBarbera (2013) found that students' perceptions of connectedness with the instructor significantly correlated with overall course satisfaction. Also, the amount, type, and method of feedback provided by the instructor related to students' satisfaction with the online learning experience (LaBarbera, 2013). In some instances, increasing the number of interactions between an instructor and a student had a positive effect on student satisfaction (Ladyshewsky, 2013). Similar results regarding a strong sense of community were noted by Liu, Magjuka, Bonk, and Lee (2007). In addition, it was reported that technological barriers pertaining to asynchronous delivery were to blame for low levels of presence and an overall sense of connectedness (Liu et al., 2007). Kiriakidis (2008) found that high levels of instructor discourse were associated with higher levels of learner discourse and that this had a significant impact on student satisfaction.

Indicators of Perceived Learning

Picciano (2002) found that "There is a strong, positive relationship between student perceptions of their interaction in the course and their perceptions of the quality and quantity of their learning" (p. 28). Richardson and Swan (2003) found that students who perceived a high level of social presence also perceived that they learned more from the educational experience indicating a relationship between social presence and perceived learning. Akyol and Garrison (2014) found that both teaching and cognitive presence have a significant relationship to perceived learning indicating that students believe they learn more when they perceive high levels of cognitive and teaching presence.

Swan and Shih (2005) found a strong correlation between perceived social presence between instructors and peers and perceived learning. They also found there to be a very close relationship between perceived social presence and perceived learning. Additionally, they found significant relationships between social presence and perceived interactions. These findings may have implications in online discussion design or facilitation as they may indicate that the social components of online discussion are more important to students than other types of interactions (Swan & Shih, 2005).

Much of what Sheridan and Kelly (2010) found regarding the elements of instructor presence that students find most important were consistent with existing literature. Such findings included instructors making course requirements clear and being responsive to students' needs. Also important is that students in that study indicated they valued the timeliness of feedback and information. Another important finding was "while the students generally placed high value on communication and the instructor's responsiveness, they did

not place as much importance on synchronous face-to-face communication" (Sheridan & Kelly, 2010, p. 776). One exception involved the sense of community in a learning experience. Previous research has focused on the importance of the feelings of community and connectedness in a distance education course (Liu, Magjuka, Bonk, & Lee, 2007; Mandernach, Gonzales, & Garrett, 2006; Park & Bonk, 2007; Shakelford & Maxwell, 2012; Shea et al., 2005; Shea et al. 2006; Tu & McIssac, 2002). That premise was not supported in Sheridan and Kelly's (2010) study as students did not indicate that it was important for an instructor to establish or maintain a sense of community. Shea et al. (2006) found that a strong teaching presence impacted students' perceived learning as well as sense of learning community. Finally, a student satisfaction survey indicated that interaction with the instructor was the single most significant contributor to perceived learning in online courses (Frederickson, Pickett, Pelz, Swan, & Shea, 1999).

Instructional Practices to Establish Instructor Presence in Online Course Settings

Discussion Forum Boards

One way that instructors can establish instructor presence in online course settings is through the use of asynchronous discussion boards. Swan (2003) found that students' perceptions of the value of discussion boards were most significantly related to interaction with the instructors and interaction with peers. By being asynchronous in nature, discussion boards allow for all students to participate at their convenience. Another benefit of discussion boards is that they allow all students to have a voice and do not allow for more overbearing students to dominate the conversation (Swan, 2003). The use of discussion boards allows each and every learner the opportunity to respond to questions, equally participate, and presents the possibility for students and instructors to co-construct knowledge through thorough and meaningful discourse (Vonderwell, Liang, & Alderman, 2007).

According to Costley (2015), the most frequently used instructional practice in online courses in higher educational settings were asynchronous discussion forums. Asynchronous online forums were popular because they are generally easy to use for basic student to student communication as well as more complex collaborative tasks (Costley, 2015). How these discussion forums are organized, structured, monitored, frequented, and managed are worthy of considerable consideration. How instructors set up these interactions can have a profound impact on the learning experience of students and the learning environment of the course. "In an online environment, the way that a teacher interacts (or doesn't interact) is one of the key elements in manipulating the way that the learners within the online learning environment will behave" (Costley, 2015, p. 27).

Discussion forums are organized into "threads." These threaded discussions have several benefits in online course settings. First, they allow for students to construct knowledge through discussion with peers and engage with course content and material. According to Dixson (2010), students found participating in discussion forums to be engaging. This engagement increased the communication between students as well as between students and instructor. Second, they allow for instructors to be adaptive to learners by monitoring interactions between students and identifying topics that might need further clarification. Another benefit is discussion forums allow for students to discuss controversial or sensitive issues that they may be hesitant discussing in a face-to-face environment (Murphy & Fortner, 2014). One of the main limitations of utilizing discussion forums is student participation. There is considerable debate in the literature about the levels of instructor participation. Some argue it is beneficial and can improve student participation while others say that it hinders or limits student participation (Murphy & Fortner, 2014).

Mazzolini and Maddison (2007) found that the way in which instructors post to discussion forums has significant impact on how students participated in those discussions. Mazzolini and Maddison (2007) found that the more often instructors posted, the fewer postings were submitted by students and the shorter the overall discussion threads were. Instructors who tried to intervene by increasing their own participation did not yield successful results (Mazzolini, Madison & 2007). Timing of instructor postings also is worth consideration. In the same study, the authors found that two main ways of posting were implemented by instructors. Some instructors posted in the middle of the discussion attempting to corral enthusiasm and prompt more discussion while others posted at the end to serve more of a wrap up function and answer lingering questions. The author's found that instructors who posted early on in the discussion had better results and scored higher on course evaluation surveys for both enthusiasm and overall effectiveness (Mazzolini & Madison, 2007). Murphy and Fortner (2014) found that students who received instructor postings as compared with students who did not receive instructor postings, submitted a lower number of posts. These results do not support the notion that increased instructor participation positively impacts student participation. In fact, these results are much more consistent with other studies that show when instructors intervene there can be negative results such as hindered discussion or inhibiting the number of posts students make over the designated posting period. (Murphy & Fortner, 2014)

Instructor Feedback

One way that instructors can establish instructor presence in online course settings is through the use of feedback. Feedback can be defined as "information provided from instructors to students about course activities in which students were engaged, including written assignments, conference postings, and course interactions" (Getzlaf, Perry, Toffner, Lamarche,

Edwards, 2009). Gallien and Oomen-Early (2008) define feedback as "any message generated in response to a learner's action" (p. 465). Feedback can be both objective and constructive with the prior including product-oriented information such as comments evaluating a written assignment and the latter being more process oriented such as suggestions on improving on the content of a student's online conference postings (Getzlaf et al., 2009). In an online learning setting, the instructor's role has shifted from the sage on the stage to more of a facilitator of learning. Part of the role of the facilitator is to "overcome incoherence, provide feedback, and scaffold student learning" (Vonderwell, et. al, 2007).

Two types of feedback are corrective feedback and motivational feedback. Corrective feedback attempts to provide information about a learner's performance and, through error correction, aims to increase learning (Pyke & Sherlock, 2010). Motivational feedback is designed to encourage a student, persuade a student to take an action, or influence potentially his or her behavior. Whereas corrective feedback stresses the specific task content, motivational feedback is focused on the learner. The differences found in individual learners affects their enthusiasm, and these differences affect feedback needs. (Pyke & Sherlock, 2010). Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006) identified seven principles of good feedback practice: helps clarify good performance (goals, criteria, expected standards); facilitates the development of self-assessment in learning; encourages teacher and peer dialogue about learning; delivers high quality information to students about their learning; provides opportunities to close the gap between current and desired performance; encourages positive motivational beliefs and self-esteem; and provides information to teachers that can be used to help shape teaching.

Feedback in online environments is different than in a traditional face-to-face environment. In those settings, oral feedback, body mannerisms, and facial gestures all can be

used as some form of feedback. In online settings, however, these types of interactions are not always possible. Instructors who teach online must succinctly communicate their thoughts in written form so that all students clearly understand what is being communicated (Gallien & Oomen-Early, 2008). This can be difficult for some instructors and the amount of time required to provide each student with sufficient feedback can be quite extensive. That said, instructor feedback is an important component of a successful online learning environment. Gallien and Oomen-Early (2008) found that students who received some form of personal feedback from their instructor on average performed better than students who had not. They also found that students who received personalized feedback on average were more satisfied with the course, however, those same students did not perceive themselves as being more connected with the instructor than students who only received collective feedback. Young, Hicks, Villa-Lobos, and Franklin (2014) found that instructor to student feedback is useful towards promoting COI in a distance education or online learning environment. They also found that there is the potential for increased knowledge attainment when instructors create a supportive atmosphere for teaching presence.

According to Getzlaf et al., (2009) instructor feedback allows students to evaluate existing knowledge, consider what they have learned and what they still need to learn, and collect recommendations for improvement of future work" (Getzlaf et al., 2009). And while the literature does support the notion that instructors providing feedback has positive impacts on students' learning experiences (Gallien & Ootmen-Early; Getzlaf et al., 2009; 2008, Vonderwell et. al, 2007, Young et al., 2014) there are some serious challenges for online instructors. One of them is that rarely is there an opportunity to provide feedback in real-time. In face-to-face learning environments, instructors are often able to immediately respond after a learning

experience. For example, in in-class discussions an instructor is able to make comments to the entire group immediately to answer questions or clarify ideas. This is not necessarily the case in an online course especially one that is delivered primarily asynchronously. It is imperative that online instructors provide feedback that is prompt, timely, regular supportive, constructive, non-threatening, meaningful, and helpful" (Getzlaf et al., 2009).

Peer Feedback

Although it is well documented that instructor- to-student feedback is beneficial in online learning environments (Getzlaf et al., 2009, Gallien, Ootmen-Early, 2008, Vonderwell et. al, 2007, Young et al., 2014), student-to-student feedback is also valuable. One of the benefits of using peer feedback is the increased timeliness of students receiving feedback (Ertmer et al, 2007). Ertmer et al., (2007) found that the majority of students felt that peer feedback positively impacted the quality of their discussion postings and noted some specific benefits of peer feedback such as access to multiple perspectives, recognition of their ideas, and a receipt of greater quantity of feedback than would have been received from the instructor alone. Students also identified that peer feedback helped them to improve the quality of feedback that they provided to others (Ertmer et al., 2007).

Hew (2015) also found utilizing peer feedback to be beneficial in an online educational environment. Hew (2015) found that students preferred peer feedback when participants desire greater ownership in determining the direction of the discussion. Sher (2009) found that student to student feedback are significant contributors to the level of student satisfaction and learning in a technology-mediated environment. Lu and Law (2011) found that the provision by student

assessors of feedback that identified problems and gave suggestions, was a significant predictor of the performance of assesses.

Audio and Video

Another way that instructors can establish instructional presence in an online learning environment is through the use of audio and video. In an online environment it is easy for students to become disengaged from a course and begin to feel isolated. One strategy to help develop connection and real, meaningful relationships to students who are geographically dispersed is to create personalized video content. According to Underdown and Martin (2016) instructors who frequently use video in online courses consistently receive higher feedback scores related to the level of faculty engagement and utilizing video content increases the level of instructor presence which helps keep students motivated, engaged, and active in an online course. The authors also identify examples of types of videos that instructors can use. These include a welcome-to-class video, a syllabus overview video, an embedded feedback video, and a student feedback video (Underdown & Martin, 2016). The authors note that two serious challenges facing online instructors and online program administrators are a lack of meaningful engagement and the absence of present and engaged instructors. They contend that instructors who frequently use personalized video content will be more successful in counterbalancing these issues (Undertown & Martin, 2016).

Draus, Curran, and Trempus (2014) found that the use of personalized video in online courses has a profound impact on a student's experience. First, they found that the use of instructor-generated video content can have a positive moderate influence on student

engagement and student satisfaction in an online course delivered asynchronously. They also found that students perceived a high degree of value in the instructor-generated video, that grades increased by 3.2% and that persistence rates were unaffected (Draus, Curran, & Trempus, 2014). Lastly, they found that the length of student discussion postings increased in courses where the instructor incorporated instructor-generated content (Draus, et al., 2014).

Borup, West, Thomas, and Graham (2014) found that the use of video feedback affects a student's experience in an online educational environment. More specifically, they concluded that students found video feedback more effective at establishing instructor social presence. This was because students could see emotions, talk in a conversational manner, and form some type of connection with students (Borup et al, 2014). Bhat, Chinprutthiwong, and Perry (2015) looked at different formats of instructional videos to see which ones were more impactful for students. They found that courses that use video communication resulted in much richer instructor-student interaction than simply audio narration They also found that learners need to have a sense of relatedness to their instructors which can be established through the use of personalized video (Bhat et al, (2015).

Social Media

The majority of the learning activities and interaction in an online course takes place in the LMS. Although most are quite comparable in terms of functionality, Dunlap and Lowenthal (2009) contended that the LMS is not adequate to meet all of the needs of an effective instructional environment online. According to Dunlap and Lowenthal (2009) the typical LMS provides tools that establish and increase presence when used appropriately such as

asynchronous discussions and synchronous chat tools. The main issue, according to Dunlap and Lowenthal (2009), was that students and faculty have to go through a series of steps to login and navigate to several different locations to engage in the course discussion, collaboration, and sharing. This can lead the communication to feel forced, or out of context of a normal experience. They also noted the possibility of losing the free-flowing, normal banter that faculty have with their students in the traditional on-campus courses. It is this informal type of communication that allows individuals to get to know one another, experience the personalities of others, and connect on an emotional level.

Dunlap and Loewnthal (2009) suggested using social media platforms such as Twitter to engage with students in real-time. They also identify a number of instructional benefits of using Twitter. These include addressing student issues in a timely manner, writing concisely, writing for an audience, connecting with a professional community, supporting informal learning, and maintaining on-going relationships (Dunlap & Lowenthal, 2009).

DeSchryver, Mishra, Koehler, and Francis (2009) investigated the effect of using the social network site Facebook for online course discussions and how, if at all, that would vary than using the LMS for course discussions. While their study did not yield any significant differences in terms of perceived social presence of students, the authors contended there are potential benefits of using Facebook in online educational settings. These benefits include the continuation of learning long after the semester is over and that the interactions amongst users are both professional and personal (Deschryver et al, 2009).

Leafman and Mathieson (2015) found that instructors perceived a high level of social presence in an LMS and that they were generally satisfied with the level of social interaction that occurred in their courses. They also reported that these same instructors specified that

communications in an LMS tended to be more detached than teleconference discussions and that communication through an LMS was not an exceptional medium for social interactions. They also noted that despite instructor's perceptions that an LMS fosters a satisfactory level of social presence, potentially significant LMS limitations exist. The good news is that same group of instructors had ready access to at least one form of social media and expressed both comfort and a sense of proficiency using these types of platforms.

Sense of Community

Rovai (2002) defined a community as "a group of people who are socially interdependent, who participate together in discussion and decision making, and who share certain practices that both define the community and are nurtured by it. Such a community is not quickly formed. It almost always has a history and so is also a community of memory, defined in part by its past and its memory of the past" (p. 2). Rovai (2002) contended that this definition of community certainly is applicable in an online educational setting. According to Rovai (2002) classroom community can be characterized or defined in terms of four dimensions: spirit, trust, interaction, and commonality of expectation and goals. Shea et al. (2005) contended that the social nature of learning allows for online learning environments to be designed to leverage and reflect the social aspects of learning. They continue by suggesting that previous research identified the importance that the role of community can have in both building and sustaining productive learning environments. They also noted that teaching presence is one of the fundamental ways in which an instructor can facilitate the development of online learning community (Shea et al., 2005). Shea et al. (2005) recommended professional developments should help new online instructors understand the roles associated with establishing teaching presence in online courses because of the strong association between student's perception of

teaching presence and the reported levels of connectedness and learning. They also cited the importance of understanding the pedagogy of online learning and its significant role in teaching effectiveness.

Shackelford and Maxwell (2012) found that a students' sense of community (SoC) is impacted most by practices such as instructor modeling, support and encouragement, facilitation of discussion, use of multiple communication modes, and required participation. They also identified seven learner-instructor interactions that empirically support the development of SoC in online contexts. These include: providing information on goals, expectations, and ethics, participating in and guiding discussions, providing support and encouragement, providing timely feedback, using multiple modes of communication, instructor modeling, and required participation (Shackelford & Maxwell, 2012). Rovai (2000) analyzed several factors that can influence SoC among distance learners. These included student-instructor ration, transactional distance, social presence and instructor immediacy, lurking, social equality, collaborative learning, group facilitation, and self-directed learning. Closely related to the development of community is the notion of instructor immediacy. "Instructor immediacy, which applies to both face-to-face and online facilitation, is generally defined as verbal and non-verbal behaviors that reduce psychological and physical distance" (Mathieson & Leafman, 2014, p. 3). "In an online education environment, immediacy behaviors can help bridge the "transactional distance," which is the "psychological and communications space" between instructor and learner" (Mathieson & Leafman, 2014, p. 3).

Course Design and Pedagogy

Teaching online is greatly different from teaching in a traditional face-to-face format. The needs of the learners are different. The environments are not the same. Too often programs that moved to online formats is a lack of training for faculty in both the areas of course design and online pedagogy. According to Kennette and Redd (2015) although it can be challenging in an online educational environment, it is imperative that instructors continue to work to create a sense of presence in online courses not only prior to the official commencement of the course, but also through entire duration of the course.

There are many ways that instructors can increase their presence in an online course. Some examples of how instructors can have increased their presence in online classrooms include sending students a welcome message, limiting class size, providing introductions to students, and orienting students to the course. Other ways include holding electronic office hours, providing timely and individualized feedback on assignments, sending frequent and personalized announcements posting to discussion boards, and using engaging videos.

Shie, Gummer, and Niess (2008) insisted that an effective online experience starts with the role of the instructor shifting to a facilitator and that all of the class activities must be student centered. They also contended there are seven teaching practices that should be implemented for effective online instruction. Those include: encouraging active learning, valuing diverse talents and ways of learning, emphasizing time on task, promoting student cooperation, encouraging student-instructor interaction, providing timely feedback, and communicating high expectations (Shie, Gummer, Niess, (2008). According to Tunks (2012) an effective online learning experience starts with the use of Web 2.0 tools. Web 2.0 tools allow instructors to interact with students in creative ways and encourages students to work collaboratively as a classroom community rather than passively viewing information. Tunks offered four

suggestions for implementing Web 2.0 tools in online courses. They are: become familiar with the many choices of Web 2.0 tools, plan in advance which tools will be incorporated into the class and decide how they will be used, make students aware of all Web 2.0 tools that will be used early in the term, preferably when they first log on to a new class, and collect feedback from students on their experiences using the Web 2.0 tools in the class (Tunks, 2012).

Lewis and Abdul-Hamid (2006) analyzed what types of instructional pedagogy makes an online faculty member effective. They found the instructional practices that were most important in an online setting to be fostering interaction, providing feedback, facilitating learning, and maintaining enthusiasm and organization (Lewis & Abdul-Hamid, 2006). Bonk and Kim (2006) found that the most important skills for an instructor teaching online were learning facilitation and the development of quality courses through course design. According to Kiriakidis (2008) in online learning environments, pedagogy consists of any instructional practice that engages, reinforces, or motivates students. This must include some form of curriculum, evaluation, and feedback. Feedback is imperative in an online learning setting to both motivate and engage students and encourage active learning.

According to Roby, Ashe, Singh, and Clark (2013) the necessary components for a successful online learning experience are providing required meeting times before course registration begins, offering technical support to students and instructors, ensuring that instructional design and material development resources are made available, allowing instructors to teach interesting courses that encourage undergraduate research, developing policies that acknowledge the amount of preparation, facilitation, and contact hours required for online instructors, and identify (and adhere to) the most effective class size for an online course.

Synchronous Elements

Two reasons that students are drawn to online education programs are convenience and anonymity. Requiring synchronous elements to online courses hinders the convenience element for students. Requiring students to use some type of synchronous audio or video is contrary to both convenience and anonymity. That being said, adding synchronous elements to online courses can be an effective method of establishing instructor presence in online courses. According the Scheuermann (2010) "The evidence indicates that online students (and course facilitators alike) overwhelmingly find considerable value in synchronous course elements" (p. 1). In fact, "Over time, between 70-100 percent of enrolled students, on a course-by-course basis, have stated that I should retain the online chat sessions in future offerings of my courses, that is, not make the course completely asynchronous where "Anytime, Anywhere" prevails" (p. 1). Scheuermman suggested several strategies to incorporate synchronous components in online courses. These include advancing to optional sessions with online students, introducing one or two mandatory synchronous sessions per course, broadening the required use of online chat elements across the academic term, communicating strategies ahead of time to the enrolled students and ensuring success from the instructors and programs perspectives. Other strategies include setting the students up for success in using synchronous chat, establishing and publishing the course schedule early when designating synchronous elements in online courses, regulating group size in each online chat session, setting up guidelines for students relative to the synchronous sessions, conducting actual online sessions in a synchronous manner that are engaging and meaningful, and soliciting student feedback relative to synchronous online elements (Scheuermann, 2010).

According to McBrien et al (2009) students had favorable reactions to the use of synchronous elements being used in courses. However, the researchers indicated three main problems. The first was that there was confusion that resulted from having too many interactions taking place simultaneously. For example, students found it overwhelming that interactions could include audio chat, typed chat, whiteboard presentations, and group discussions that could be answered using emoticons all at the same time . The second issue was some students found that the lack of non-verbal communication adversely affected their overall educational experience. Lastly, technology issues ranging from broken URL's to faculty headset equipment negatively affected online courses. The limitation of this study is that it is not generalizable. Clearly additional research in the area of synchronous online learning experiences is necessary.

Synchronous elements can be traced to the use of closed-circuit television utilized on university campuses back in the 1940's, and then later in video-conferencing and interactive televisions in the 1980's (Johnson, 2006). Johnson (2006) indicates that synchronous communication and collaboration tools such as audio and video conferencing, the ability to chat with text, and interactive, sharable whiteboards are progressively essential in online learning environments. Synchronous chat opportunities are valuable in providing virtual office hours, building a sense of community, providing the opportunity to brainstorm, team decision making and working out technical issues (Johnson, 2006). Limitations of synchronous chat sessions include scheduling issues (getting students online at the same time), lack of reflection time for students to process concepts and ideas, and difficulty for faculty members to moderate larger scale group conversation (Johnson, 2006).

In a research study on the use of synchronous chats in a theory course in Educational Communications and Technology, Schwier and Balbar (2002) found that synchronous

communication contributed dramatically to both the convenience and continuity of the class as well as promoting a strong sense of community. Schwier and Balbar (2002) also noted some additional benefits of synchronous sessions. One benefit is convenience. Being able to attend a meeting remotely using web conferencing software is much easier for some than physically attending a meeting. Another benefit is establishing a sense of community. By meeting in real time they were able to establish a feeling of immediacy and urgency characterized by dynamic exchanges over the course material (Schwier & Balbar, 2002).

Schwier and Balbar (2002) do however identify several limitations of synchronous communication. First, there can exist limitations related to the technical skills of participants in the synchronous sessions. Another issue is the tendency of participants to feel isolated by the difficulty of trying to do so many things at one time. Trying to process an idea, thinking about a response, then composing a response, while trying to monitor others' responses can simply be too much for some participants (Schwier & Balbar, 2002). Another limitation is that often times synchronous communication can be difficult to follow. With so many threads taking place at one time it can be a bit overwhelming. Lastly, when dealing with online technology, technical difficulties are often an issue. Screens freezing, participants getting locked up or booted out of the platform, delays, bandwith issues, and buffering can all present issues and challenges to a synchronous meeting (Schwier & Balbar, 2002).

A study on the preferences of preservice teachers towards asynchronous or synchronous delivery revealed an initial preference towards asynchronous discussions (Levin, He, & Robbins, 2006). Over the course of the study, however, there was a dramatic shift with the majority of those involved in the study finding preference with synchronous interactions over asynchronous ones (Levin et al., 2006). According to the results, it appeared that the initial preference toward

asynchronous discussions was the result of the participants' familiarity with online discussion boards. Reasons for why students ended up preferring the synchronous discussions included their preference to have a set time for the discussion, their fondness for receiving immediate feedback to their discussion comments and that they believed that other students' responses had an impact on inspiring their own thinking (Leving et al., 2006). Other perceived benefits of students in the study included the ability to connect with other learners, a sense of better retention of course content, an emphasis of serious consideration of important issues, and learning more about others (Leving et al., 2006).

According to Perez (2003) chatroom synchronous chat sessions allow students the opportunity to negotiate meaning and to converse spontaneously away from textbooks because of their nature and requirement of immediate response. In a study of foreign language productivity in synchronous versus asynchronous computer-mediated instruction Perez (2003) found that student preference was equally divided amongst the two delivery formats. Among participants, 50% favored the synchronous option, while the other 50% favored the asynchronous option. It should also be noted that none of the participants disliked either delivery, and that both of these particular learning tools proved to be both enjoyable and effective for all parties involved (Perez, 2003). Perez (2003) noted that the nature of the synchronous session may have put an additional strain on participants and that there was a more relaxed nature from the asynchronous communications because it gave participants more time to process information due to the fact they did not necessarily have to provide an immediate response.

In a study analyzing the perceptions of pharmacists at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Buxton (2013) found that in terms of student perceptions of the differences between an asynchronous delivery versus a synchronous delivery there were no significant differences

between groups. More specifically there were no significant differences in the areas of user friendliness of webinar formats, the surroundings being conducive to learning, or the sense of the participant to feeling a sense of belonging to a group (Buxton, 2013). There were also no significant difference in any questions related to program content and objectives, the level of respect of presenters, the level extent to which the presenter was concerned over the students receiving a positive learning experience, or the extent to which the presenter exuded a level of enthusiasm about the topic (Buxton, 2013). Buxton (2013) concluded that while distance learning offers the independence of location while asynchronous learning greatly contributes to the flexibility of time, that participants in the study who participated asynchronously were more satisfied with their learning experience because of the ability to have more control of their learning experience. Buxton (2013) suggests a dual-format program to allow for flexibility to meet the needs of all learner preferences to cater to each individual learning style and preference, and thus maximizing marketability and learner satisfaction.

In a study on the comparative content analysis of student interactions in synchronous and asynchronous learning networks, Chou (2002) found that interaction between course participants is an integral component in distance learning. Additionally, the researcher found that constructivist-based instructional activities are conducive to interaction and that a higher percentage of social emotional interactions take place in synchronous interactions as opposed to asynchronous sessions (Chou, 2002). With that said, students spent more time attending to task-oriented forms of interaction is asynchronous discussion environments than they did in synchronous discussions (Chou, 2002).

According to Skylar (2009), synchronous courses deliver online learning experiences that are very interactive. Utilizing a number of different technologies and web conferencing

platforms, synchronous learning provides advantages such as immediate access to the instructor for feedback and real time sharing of learning (Skylar, 2009). Skylar also noted some limitations of this form of delivery: this form of delivery requires a set day and time that is contradictory to the "anytime, anywhere" model of learning that online learning has traditionally promoted (Skylar, 2009). In a study that compared preservice teacher's performance and satisfaction in a course that utilized two types of instruction (synchronous and asynchronous) the researcher found that both types of deliveries were effective in delivering online instruction (Skylar, 2009). That said, almost three-fourths of students indicated they would rather take a course that included some form of synchronous element as opposed to a completely asynchronous course (Skylar, 2009).

Conclusions

The literature provides a thorough and broad description of the historical context of the notion of instructor presence tracing its origins back to the COI framework. There is much evidence in terms of each of the three learning experiences: perceived effectiveness, overall satisfaction, and performance. Much has been written about the benefit of using discussion boards and the incredible importance of feedback, especially instructor-to-student feedback. The same can be said about establishing a sense of community in online courses. As technology continues to improve and change it will be important to further research the effectiveness of the use of video and social media in establishing instructor presence in online courses. Further study into appropriate course design practices and online instructional pedagogy is also incredibly important. More research in the area of synchronous online learning experiences is required to continue to adapt online programs that meet the needs of an ever changing student population.

Summary

This chapter focused on key areas of instructor presence such as the origins of instructor presence, how it has been characterized and understood over time, related concepts in the literature, and how those concepts have helped to shape and develop the collective understanding of instructor presence. In addition, this chapter discussed three specific areas of online learning experiences: perceived effectiveness, overall satisfaction, and performance. This chapter also examined specific instructional practices teachers engage in to establish instructor presence in online course settings. Finally, this chapter posed conclusions and implications for future consideration. Additional research about instructor presence in online environments is necessary to ensure that online learning spaces and experiences are meeting the ever-changing needs of students. Specific areas of interest include online pedagogy, the use of audio and video, synchronous and asynchronous deliveries, methods of communication, and sense of community. It is also necessary to identify the instructional practices that students identify as valuable to their learning.

CHAPTER 3: METHODS

Description of the Study

The purpose of this study was to research ways and methods that faculty establish instructor presence in an online learning environment in higher education, and how those methods impact students in these learning environments. More specifically, this study analyzed instructor presence by seeking answers to the following question:

- What online instructional practices do students perceive as valuable to their learning?

Participants

For the Spring 2018 semester, the University's enrollment was 1173 students. Of those, approximately 500 were enrolled as traditional "onground" students while approximately 500 were enrolled as distance students in the online program pursuing an Associate's, Bachelor's, Master's degree or a certificate. The remaining 200 students were enrolled in the dual credit program. Dual credit students are high school students who take a college class, most often English 101 or College Algebra, and receive credit for it at both the University as well as the high school. This study focused only on students enrolled in the distance education program that is offered online. Although some of the students in the online program were traditional college-aged, the majority of them were non-traditional students, many of whom work full-time and balance their school responsibilities with work and family obligations. The University's online program attracts a large number of active or former military students, military spouses, and first-generation college students.

The survey was sent to a total of 661 students who had taken an online class in the last year. Student groups included in the sample were online, onground, undergraduate, and graduate. Of the 661students who were contacted, 190 (28.7%) students completed the survey

(n=190). The survey was sent to 454 online students of which 144 (31.7%) submitted responses. A total of 181 onground students were invited to participate of which 46 (25.4%) accepted. A total of 635 of the students invited were undergraduate of which 164 (25.8%) completed the survey. The remaining 26 students were graduate students and all 26 (100%) of them completed the survey. Although the hope was to have a higher response rate, these figures are consistent with participation rates experienced by other such as Student Affairs, Institutional Research and Effectiveness, and the Teaching and Learning Center (CITE). In fact, participation results for the instructor presence survey were slightly higher than both Student Affairs and Institutional Research and Effectiveness reported on surveys those offices had concurrently with the instructor presence survey.

In terms of gender, the majority of participants who completed the survey were female. 167 (87.9%) of participants were female. Only 23 (12.1%) of participants identified as male. A third option "prefer not to answer" was included for those who may identify as neither male nor female, or who were not comfortable answering this particular question. That choice, however, was not selected by any respondents who completed the survey. A summary of respondents' ages are reported in Table 1. A summary of the students' ethnicity are reported in Table 2. While these figures are not completely in line with the overall University population as a whole, they are consistent in terms of the makeup of the school's population. In the spring 2018 semester, there were 832 (70.1%) female students enrolled at the University to 341 (29.9%) males.

Table 1

Distribution of respondents by age percentages

Age group	Percentage
< = 18	1.6%
19-24	25.8%
25-30	19.5%
31-35	17.4%
36-42	17.9%
43 = <	17.9%

Table 2

Distribution of respondents by ethnicity percentages

Race	Percentage
White	75.8%
African American	11.1%
Hispanic or Latino	7.9%
Asian	2.1%
Other	1.6%
Prefer not to answer	1.6%
Native American	0%

In terms of the how the sample compares to the overall University population in terms of age and ethnicity there are some differences. In terms of age 525 (44.8%) of students identified as being in the 19-24 age group in the overall population. None of the other categories had any more than 10%. The 25-30 group accounted for 108 (9.2%) while the 42 or older had 110 (9.4%) students. This seems reasonable given that the majority of the students who took the survey were online students and that is a fairly older population while the total University population would reflect the large number of onground students we have on campus who are

between 18-24 years of age. A comparison of the ethnicity makeups of the overall population and the sample are fairly closer with a total of 692 (59.0%) identifying as white while 148 (12.6%) identified as African American and 57 (4.9%) identified as Hispanic or Latino. Perhaps the biggest difference, however, was the number of students who preferred not to answer in the overall population figures. That number was 250 students which accounts for 21.3% of the population.

Students were also asked whether or not they had ever served in any branch of the armed services and only 12 students (6.3%) indicated that they had. The majority of students indicated that they had not previously or were not currently on active duty. In terms of military service, 178 (93.7%) of respondents answered as not having ever served in the military. Participants were also asked whether or not they were first-generation college. There was some concern that students may not know what the term meant that a lack of understanding about terminology would skew the results. Because of this concern, a clarifying statement was added to the question defining first-generation college students as being the first member of their family to attended college. In terms of first generation college students, 69 (36.3%) of respondents identified as being the first member of their family to attend college.

Students were also asked to identify as either traditional age or non-traditional age. As was the case in the first-generation college question, there was concern that some students might not know what either of these terms meant. A statement was added to the question that defined traditional students as those who entered college immediately after high school. Seventy-two (37.9%) indicated that they were traditional students while 118 (62.1%) identified as being non-traditional students. In terms of full-time versus part-time status 156 (82.1%) indicated that they were full-time while 34 (17.9%) identified as being part-time. Students were also asked to

classify themselves as either online students or onground and 144 (75.8%) of students identified as being online students while 46 (24.2%) considered themselves as an onground student but had taken at least one online class within the last year. A summary of student's level of academic standing is reported in Table 3.

Table 3

Academic level of standing	percentages
Freshman	9.0%
Sophomore	14.2%
Junior	26.3%
Senior	36.8%
Graduate	13.7%

In terms of the how the sample compares to the overall University population in terms of full-time or part-time status there are again some differences. While over 82% of the sample indicated they were full-time students, the overall population is only 57.5% full-time. There were also significant differences in the reported data of the onground versus online classification. While over 75% of the sample identified as being online only 450 (42.9%) of the overall population characterized themselves as online students. This again is not unreasonable given what is known about the online population that completed the survey and the overall number of students that program accounts for in relation to the overall size of the University's population.

Setting

This study took place at a small, Catholic, liberal arts institution in the southeast located in the downtown of a city of approximately 60,000. This institution was founded by the Ursuline

Sisters of Mount Saint Joseph with a focus on personal and social transformation through education. The Ursulines have a long tradition of education since their founding in 1535 by St. Angela Merici. Born in Italy, St. Angela Merici advocated for women, asserting that the key for developing the individual is education and spiritual formation. She dedicated her life to educating girls and young women, especially the poor. The Ursuline educational spirit believes in focusing on the individual, the power of education to transform, commitment to the whole person, valuing the creative arts, the importance of service, concern for the marginalized, leadership through invitation and persuasion, centrality of community, Gospel imperative to work for justice, the call to adapt and change, and the primacy of hope.

Fundamental to the institution's identity as an institution is what is known as the "Difference." The Difference consists of four components: Respect for the Sacred, Devotion to Learning, Commitment to Growth in Virtue, and Servant Leadership. Each of these pillars is essential in providing students with individualized attention and assisting in developing their intellectual capacity as well as encouraging growth in both character and moral virtue. The institution has always considered the Difference to be a key driver of the strategic goals and initiatives for the institution. This is certainly the case in terms of the University's commitment to service within the community.

A primary focus of the University is providing education to those who would otherwise not be able to receive it. To that end, in the 1980's the University created a "Weekend College" program to provide an alternative for the growing number of non-traditional age students who wanted to pursue a college degree. Then in 2001, the Success Tracks for Adults Returning to School (STARS) program was implemented. STARS was specifically designed to help adult learners who were returning to school. These adult learners faced some unique challenges in

returning to school due to a number of factors such as full-time work commitments, and family responsibilities. The STARS program used weekends but also offered some classes on week nights. After a few years of offering the STARS program, an online component was introduced and one of the courses was moved to an online delivery system. The course was a library resource class and was first offered online in the 2002-2003 academic year. Beginning in 2008, the University began offering continuous online courses and completely online degrees. In 2012, STARS officially changed to its current title: BUonline.

One unique requirement of the online programs is the inclusion of a "weekly chat" session. Each online course has a designated hour during the week that the instructor and students meet synchronously via Adobe Connect. Individual faculty are responsible for what actually takes place during the chat and there is variance across different classes. Much of this variance is attributed to academic discipline, faculty personality, faculty teaching philosophy, and level of the course. Most courses, however, utilize some form of discussion where they can discuss troublesome topics, explore difficult concepts, and answer questions for students who may be struggling.

Research Design

According to Creswell (2012) "Survey research designs are procedures in quantitative research in which investigators administer a survey to a sample or to the entire population of people to describe attitudes, opinions, behaviors, or characteristics" (p. 376). More specifically this study employed a cross sectional survey design. Cross-sectional surveys are especially useful in examining attitudes, beliefs, and practices as well as evaluating programs (Creswell, 2012). Data was collected through a survey to determine what online instructional practices students perceive as valuable to their learning.

Data Sources

During the literature review process a survey (Sheridan & Kelly, 2010) was identified as an appropriate instrument for this research study. Permission to use the survey from Dr. Kathleen Sheridan was obtained in the summer of 2016. The original survey was a questionnaire consisting of three sets of items. The first included sixty-four closed-ended items to measure the importance of various indicators of instructor presence specifically in online courses. The second set contained five open-ended items which allows students to indicate which of the indicators are most important. The third set included both closed- and open-ended items targeting students' overall experience with online courses and their preferences for different types of learning contexts.

The instructor presence indicators were compiled primarily from instruments designed to measure instructor presence in online courses and many of the indicators were drawn from the social and teaching presence scales of the COI instrument developed by Garrison et al. (2000). Other indicators were developed from the cognitive presence scale and were centered on the types of actions an instructor might make to maintain these conditions. The overall intent was to create a broad, yet inclusive list of the type of actions an instructor would typically take in designing, delivering, and monitoring an online course (Sheridan & Kelly, 2010). The items were scored on a scale of 1 to 10 with 10 being very important and 1 being not important at all. The open-ended item asked participants to "write the 5 most important instructor behaviors for your success in an online class."

The survey was modified and shortened significantly to better address the needs of this research study. The survey used in this study contained 38 items for participants to answer. In addition to being modified to promote brevity, the alterations were intentionally geared to align

particular items to the main research question of this study which focused on the instructional practices that students perceive as valuable. Another change was that a five-point Likert rating scale was used as opposed to the original ten-point scale (see Appendix A).

Procedure

During the spring semester I obtained a complete list of students currently enrolled in the online program at the University from the Registrar's office. I then created a new contact group in my email program called "online students" and added each student from the list provided to that group. I also obtained a list of all onground students who would have been eligible to take at least one online course from the Registrar's office. This list was comprised of undergraduate sophomores, juniors, and seniors. Freshman were excluded because University policy prohibits onground freshman from taking online courses. The list also excluded onground graduate students since those courses are only offered in a traditional face-to-face, brick and mortar delivery format. I next created a new contact group in my email called "onground students" for ease of communication.

The next step I took was to transition the survey from an Excel spreadsheet into a format that would be easy for student respondents to access. After considering a number of options the decision was made to utilize Survey Monkey. After registering with Survey Monkey and signing up for an account, I began building the survey in the site. The site was fairly intuitive and relatively easy to navigate and, as a result, the survey was written and ready for respondents to take in just a few days.

After completing the survey on the Survey Monkey platform, I sent out an email message to my newly created contact groups for both online students and onground students that included

a link to the online version of the survey which they could then access and complete the survey. The narrative of the message was as follows:

Dear Prospective Survey Participant,

I am a doctoral student at Indiana University and I am conducting a research study as part of my doctoral degree requirements. The study is entitled, *Instructor Presence in Online Education: an Analysis of Instructional Practices and Student Perceptions.* This is a letter of invitation to participate in this study. The purpose of this study is to determine what instructional practices students perceive as valuable to their learning.

By agreeing to participate in this study, you are giving your consent to the researcher to include your responses in his data analysis. Your participation in this particular research study is entirely voluntary. Please understand that there are no penalties for not participating in the survey. Should you choose to participate, you will do so anonymously. There will be no identifiable information of you as an individual participant in the study. The survey should take between 10 and 15 minutes to complete. No compensation will be offered for participation in the study.

Thank you,

Jeffrey Barnette

Students were also informed that they had only two weeks to submit their responses. I sent out two separate follow up messages reminding students of the deadline to complete the survey if they wanted to participate. The first reminder message was sent five days after the initial message went out. The final reminder message was sent ten days after the initial message.

Several steps were taken to ensure confidentiality in the study. First, data documents such as survey results were recorded anonymously rather than recording subjects' identifying information on documents that contain data and responses. Second, access to identifiable

information was limited. Only the primary investigator had access to the documents containing identifiers. Third, all electronic data files were housed on password-protected drives and computers. Lastly, the methods and lengths taken to ensure confidentiality were clearly communicated with participants prior to any data being collected.

Data Analysis

The close-ended survey items were analyzed primarily using descriptive statistics. Of specific interest were the items that had the highest rated means. These items denoted the instructional practices that participants deemed most important. Also of particular interest were those items that had the lowest rated means. These items represented the instructional practices that participants considered least important. The researcher also looked at which items appeared most frequently and those that appeared least frequently? The assumption being that those items that appeared more regularly were likely considered more important while those that do not appear often were considered not very important.

The open-ended items on the survey were analyzed using thematic analysis (CITE). Each open-ended item was reviewed to determine the main themes that emerged from the participants' responses. That process involved becoming familiar with the data, studying over the responses, and categorizing the responses. Sorting through the responses to determine commonalities amongst a wide variety of answers proved both time consuming and challenging.

Further analysis included some text analysis built directly in the Survey Monkey platform itself. This tool provided the ability to sort open-ended responses in a list view that totaled the frequency of responses as well as a cloud view which provided detailed word cloud maps. Finally, different sub-groups were differentiated and compared to see if any themes emerged

based on categorization of a particular sub-group. Chapter five will provide more detailed information about the data analysis and the results based on the survey results.

Two important issues concerning the analysis of the open-ended items that were considered were reliability and validity. Given the nature of the study and the fact that students were issued the survey only one time, there was not the opportunity for any measure of test-retest reliability. The fact that there was only one researcher in the study did not provide for any measures of interrater reliability. The main measure of reliability thus was reliant on internal consistency of comparable items. For example, one section had students list the instructional practices that they found to be the five most important. Additional items on the survey had students rate each instructional practice in terms of perceived value. The results of both of these items were compared to see if there was consistency among the items. The open-ended response items were consistent with comparable responses on similar close-ended items on the survey. In terms of validity, the two main considerations were the level of face validity and content validity. In looking at the open-ended items and how they seemingly measure the constructs of interest, they appeared to have good face validity. Similarly, the open-ended items seemed to cover the constructs of interest which demonstrated a good level of content validity. These considerations of both reliability and validity will be discussed further in the limitations of the study portion of the study.

How the Data Informs the Research Question

What online instructional practices do students perceive as valuable to their learning? The survey data informed this question by providing imperative information on student attitudes towards both synchronous and asynchronous methods of communication and interaction used in a course. As indicated earlier, data was collected on feedback, timeliness of communication, engagement, motivation, and satisfaction. Demographic information was collected to see if any

trends or patterns emerged from any certain group of students. Also, information about student preference regarding learning methods was collected to see which instructional practices correlate with student partiality.

Table 4

Research Alignment

Research Question	Data Sources	Analysis Procedure
What online instructional practices do students perceive as valuable to their learning?	Student survey	Reviewed survey items from the strategies category on the instructional practices to determine which ones students perceive as valuable during an online class? Reviewed demographic category items to determine if any patterns emerge for any particular group. For example, do certain age groups rank a particular instructional practices as high while others do not? Another example could be are certain instructional practices perceived as more valuable for students in a particular year of school? For example, do some resonate more with upper division students rather than freshman and sophomores? Reviewed most important category to determine student preference in terms of what instructional practices are most important. Again, looking at other demographic categories to see if any patterns develop.

Summary

This chapter provided the methods for the research study. It described the research design, the driving research question, a detailed description of the participants, as well as a comprehensive depiction of the setting and the historical context of the program. Additionally, the procedures for the recruitment to participate in the study were described. This chapter also identified the data sources as well as the procedures for data analysis. The chapter concluded with a description of how the data informs the research question and a visual depiction of how the analysis procedures align with the research question. The following chapter describes the results of the study.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

This chapter provides an overview of the findings of the instructor presence survey. The survey contained 38 questions for participants to consider. Those 38 questions were organized across six categories: demographics, importance, strategies, academic advancement, preferences, and attitudes. The demographic portion was mostly discussed during chapter three's section on participants. The results of the next section of the survey, importance, will be discussed next.

Importance of Instructional Strategies

The first question on the survey in the importance section asked students to list the five instructional strategies they felt were most important for their success in an online course. Students were provided a list of fifteen instructional strategies to choose from, or, they could list others they thought of on their own. The response most frequently recorded by students was "provides timely communication to student questions/concerns." That response was listed by 106 of the respondents (55.8%) while another 90 students (47.4%) listed "other" in the five most important instructional strategies. The types of "other" responses varied greatly. The two most popular, however, were related to flexibility and having a well-organized and detailed syllabus.

Of the students who responded, 86 (45.3%) students listed "provides timely feedback on assignments and projects" as one of the five most important instructional strategies in an online class. Eighty-five students (44.7%) listed "engages in real time" chat sessions as being one of the most important. Rounding out the top five was "creates a course that is easy to navigate." That response was recorded by 73 (38.4%) respondents as being one of the five most important instructional strategies for their success in an online course. The five responses with the least frequency were discussion boards listed by 42 (22.1%) students, "creates a learning environment

that is welcoming to differing opinions" (21.6%) students, "provides content that is challenging to me" 29 (15.2%) students, "sense of community" 20 (10.5%), and "clear requirements" 12 (6.3%) students.

Table 5

Distribution of responses most to least frequency of inclusion in five most important instructional strategies for success in an online course

Instructional strategies	Number of responses	Percent
Provides timely communication to student questions/concerns	106	55.8%
Provides timely feedback on assignments and projects	86	45.3%
Engages in "real-time" chat sessions	85	44.7%
Creates a course that is easy to navigate	73	38.4%
Allows me to have control over my own learning	62	32.6%
Provides a video that allows me to hear and see the instructor	58	30.5%
Provides grading rubrics for all assignments, projects, and discussions	56	29.5%
Provides quality resources	50	26.3%
Provides topics and content that is relevant to me	46	24.2%
Discussion boards	42	22.1%
Creates a learning environment that is welcoming to differing opinions	41	21.6%
Provides content that is challenging to me	29	15.3%
Sense of community	20	10.5%
Clear requirements	12	6.3%

Strategies

The next series of items on the survey involved the different instructional practices that instructors in online courses engage in and the extent to which students' value each of them. Students were asked to value each of these instructional practices on a Likert scale from one to five, with a five being very valuable, a four being somewhat valuable, a three being neutral, a two being of little value, and a one being not valuable at all. Table 7 reports the average score from highest to lowest.

Table 7

Student value of instructional practices highest to lowest

Instructional Practice	score high to low
Makes course requirements clear	4.84
Provides timely communication to student's questions/concerns	4.81
Provides timely feedback on assignments and projects	4.77
Creates a course that is easy to navigate	4.76
Provides grading rubrics for all assignments, projects, and discussions	4.57
Creates a learning environment that is welcoming to different opinions	4.51
Provides quality resources	4.48
Provides topics and content that is relevant to me	4.43
Provides a video that allows me to hear and see the instructor	4.25
Provides content that is challenging to me	4.24
Engages in real-time chat sessions	4.18
Reinforces a sense of community among course participants	3.98
Utilizes discussion board	3.83
Allows me to have control over my own learning	3.17

Students rated the statements "makes course requirements clear," "provides timely communication to students questions/concerns", "provides timely feedback on assignments and projects, and "creates a course that is easy to navigate" the highest. These results are consistent with existing literature on the timeliness of communication and feedback (Fredericksen, Pickett, Shea, Pelz, & Swan, 2000; Ladyshewsky, 2013; Lear et al., 2009; Piccano, 2002; Stone, & Chapman, 2006) as well as that on an easy to navigate course (Kennette & Redd, 2015; Shie et al., 2008; Bonk & Kim, 2006). This indicates that these practices are of value to students. The students scored "engages in real-time chat sessions, "reinforces a sense of community among course participants," "utilizes discussion board," and "allows me to have control over my own learning" low. These scores suggest that these practices are less valuable to students. In terms of real-time chat results, it is inconsistent with existing literature (Scheurmann, 2010; McBrian, et al., 2010). The same can be said in terms of the existing literature on sense of community (Rovai, 2002; Shea et al., Shackelford & Maxwell, 2012; Mathieson & Leafman, 2014).

Table 8

Instructional practices that students value Likert values

Data for Questions 8 through 22												
	Not Valuable at All (1)		Of Little Value (2)		Neutral (3)		Somewhat Valuable (4)		Very Valuable (5)		Total	
Question	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
8. Student value in discussion boards	4	2.2%	25	13.4%	32	17.2%	63	33.9%	62	33.3%	186	100.0%
9. Student value in timely communication	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	10	5.2%	17	9.0%	163	85.8%	190	100.0%
10. Student value in quality resources	0	0.0%	3	1.6%	21	11.0%	47	24.7%	119	62.7%	190	100.0%

11. Student value in a culture welcoming of differing opinions	0	0.0%	2	1.1%	19	10.1%	49	25.6%	120	63.2%	190	100.0%
12. Student value in the inclusion of video to see and hear the instructor	4	2.1%	8	4.2%	27	14.2%	48	25.3%	103	54.2%	190	100.0%
13. Student value in engaging in "real time" chat sessions	7	3.7%	7	3.7%	34	17.9%	38	20.0%	104	54.7%	190	100.0%
14. Student value in timely feedback on assignments and projects	0	0.0%	1	0.5%	9	4.7%	23	12.1%	157	82.7%	190	100.0%
15. Student value easy to navigate course	0	0.0%	1	0.5%	10	5.3%	22	11.6%	157	82.6%	190	100.0%
16. Student value clear course requirements	0	0.0%	1	0.5%	8	4.2%	11	5.8%	170	89.5%	190	100.0%

Data for Questions 8 through 22 (continued)

	Not Valuable at All (1)		Of Little Value (2)		Neutral (3)		Somewhat Valuable (4)		Very Valuable (5)		Total	
Question	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
17. Student value rubrics for assignments, projects, and discussions	0	0.0%	2	1.1%	22	11.6%	32	16.9%	134	70.4%	190	100.0%
18. Student value relevant content	1	0.5%	2	1.0%	23	12.1%	52	27.4%	112	59.0%	190	100.0%
19. Student value relevant content	0	0.0%	2	1.2%	23	12.2%	52	27.5%	112	59.1%	189	100.0%

20. Student value challenging content	2	1.1%	3	1.6%	30	15.8%	67	35.3%	86	46.2%	188	100.0%
21. Student value ownership of learning	0	0.0%	1	0.5%	20	10.5%	61	31.1%	108	56.8%	190	98.9%
22. Student value sense of community	3	1.6%	5	2.6%	56	29.5%	54	28.4%	72	37.9%	190	100.0%

The first item, "utilizes discussion boards" had an average score of 3.83. Another 62 (33.3%) students indicated this item to be very valuable to them, 63 (33.9%) students identified the incorporation of discussion boards as being somewhat valuable while 32 (17.2%) remained neutral on their usage. An additional 25 (13.4%) students found them to be of little value while 4 (2.2%) found the use of discussion boards to be of no value at all. These results were inconsistent with existing literature on the incorporation of discussion boards in online classes (Swan, 2003; Vonderwall et al., 2007; Costley, 2015; Dixson, 2010; Murphy & Former, 2014; Mazzolini & Maddison).

Another instructional strategy posed to students was "provides timely communication to student questions/concerns." This instructional practice earned an overall average of 4.8 on the Likert scale with 163 (85.8%) students identifying it as being very valuable, 17 (9.0%) students indicated that it was somewhat valuable while only 10 (5.3%) students remained neutral. No (0%) students identified timely communication to student questions as either of little value or not valuable at all. These results were consistent with existing literature on the importance of providing timely communication to students (Fredericksen, Pickett, Shea, Pelz, & Swan, 2000; Ladyshewsky, 2013; Lear et al., 2009; Piccano, 2002; Stone, & Chapman, 2006).

Another item that students were asked about was the value they find in an instructor providing access to a video that allows them to both hear and see the instructor. This item had an overall score of 4.3 on the Likert scale 103 students (54.2%) identifying this practice as being very valuable. Of the students who participated, 49 (25.3%) indicated that the use of video was somewhat valuable while 27 (14.2%) students remained neutral. Only 8 (4.2%) said the use of video was of little value and 4 (2.1%) indicated that it was not valuable at all. These results were inconsistent with existing literature on the use of video in online settings (Underdown & Martin, 2016; Draus et al.,2014; Borup et al., 2014; Bhat et al., 2015).

Another survey item asked students to rate the use of engaging in "real time" synchronous chat sessions. The average Likert score of this item was 4.2 with 104 (54.7%) students responded that synchronous chat sessions were very valuable while 38 (20.0%) indicated they were somewhat valuable. Another 34 (17.9%) remained neutral while 7 (3.7%) students said they were of little value and another 7 (3.7%) said they were of no value at all. These results were inconsistent with existing literature in terms of synchronous learning (Scheurmann, 2010; McBrian, et al., 2010).

Additionally, students were asked to determine the value of an instructor's timeliness in providing feedback on assignments and other class projects. The average Likert score for this item was a 4.8 with 157 (82.6%) of students indicated that this is very valuable and another 20 (12.1%) responded that it was somewhat valuable while 9 (4.7%) remained neutral. Only one (0.5%) student said it was of little value and no (0.0%) said it was of no value at all.

While the majority of the survey items dealt with instructional practices that took place during the course of an online class, one survey item specifically focused on the course design process. More specifically, instructors designing a course that is easy to navigate. The average

score for this survey item was a 4.8 with 167 (82.6%) students responded that this is very valuable, 22 (11.6%) students indicated that this is somewhat valuable., and 10 (5.3%) students remained neutral. Only 1 (0.5%) indicated that this item is of little value and no (0.0%) responded that it was not valuable at all. These results were consistent with existing literature on timeliness of feedback (Gallien & Oomen-Early, 2008, Pyke & Sherlock, 2010; Vonderwall et al., 2007).

Also focused on more of the course design aspect of an online learning experience, students were asked to assess the value in having clear course requirements. The average Likert score for this item was 4.8 with 170 (89.5%) students indicated that having clear expectations is very valuable while another 11 (5.8%) indicated that it is somewhat valuable. Another 8 (4.2%) remained neutral and only one (0.5%) student responded that this is of little value and no (0.0%) students indicated that it was not valuable at all.

Another survey item focused on more of the course setup as opposed to course facilitation students were asked to prescribe the value they placed on the inclusion of grading rubrics for all assignments, projects, and discussions. The average Likert score for this question was 4.6 with 134 (70.6%) students responded that the use of rubrics is very valuable while and additional 32 (16.9%) said it is somewhat valuable and 22 (11.6%) remained neutral. Only two (1.1%) students indicated that it is of little value and no (0.0%) students responded that it is not valuable at all.

The last of the strategies survey question inquired about the sense of community in an online course. More specifically that an instructor reinforces the development of a sense of community among course participants. The average score for this item was 4.0 with 72 (37.9%)

students said it is very valuable while another 54 (28.4%) students indicated that it is somewhat valuable. Another 56 (29.5%) students remained neutral. Only 5 (2.6%) students said it is of little valuable while another three (1.6%) said it is not valuable at all.

Academic Advancement

One section of the survey dealt with the level of academic advancement students perceive themselves to have gone through while attending online courses at the University. Students were asked to describe whether they feel their knowledge has improved within the last year. Students could respond with one of four answers: no improvement, neutral, some improvement, or much improvement. The first category, no improvement, was not selected by any of the students. The second category, neutral, was chosen by 11 (5.9%). Another 56 (29.8%) students indicated that their learning had undergone some improvement. And, 121 (64.4%) students felt that there has been much improvement in their learning in the last academic year. Two students skipped this particular question.

Table 9

Academic Advancement

Statement	Responses	Percentages
No improvement	0	0%
Neutral	11	5.9%
Some improvement	56	29.8%
Much improvement	121	64.4%

Students Learning Preferences in Online Courses

Students' learning preferences included class size, listening versus PowerPoints, and working collaboratively.

Class size preference. Another area of the survey addressed student preferences in a variety of areas. One question inquired about student preferences in terms of class size. Students were asked what size class is best for their learning? Possible answers included in groups of less than fifteen students, in groups of at least fifteen students, in bigger groups of people in a lecture setting, and other. Of those answering this item, 143 (75.3%) responded that the size class that is best for their learning is in groups of less than fifteen people while 23 (12.1%) said that groups of at least fifteen people was best for their learning, while only three (1.6%) said they preferred to learn in bigger groups in a lecture setting. An additional 21 (11.1%) chose other.

Table 10

Best online class size

Statement	Responses	Percentages
In groups of less than 15 people	143	75.3%
In groups of at least 15 people	23	12.8%
In bigger groups of people in a lecture setting	3	1.6%
Other (please specify)	21	11.1 %

The other response asked students to specify other and was an open-ended response item. Comments typically revolved around the idea that class size did not matter or had no impact on the students' experiences. For example, here are some comments regarding the preferred class size:

- "I'm good with large or small class sizes, I don't know the difference with online classrooms" (by 2 students);
- "I do not feel that it really matters in an online course although I have not taken many" (by 1 student);
- "depends on the class, some classes you need a bigger group for group discussions, more opinions, more views, other classes you might want smaller so it is easier to ask questions and interact with the teacher" (by 1 student);
- "I have no preference…(by 3 students) ;
- "class size does not matter, more people is usually more interesting thought as it brings in many opinions (by student);
- "online class size does not seem to make a difference, in an online setting it feels more like one on one no matter the class size" (by 1 student);

Course materials presentation. One section of the survey inquired about students' learning preferences and asked students to reflect on how they learn best. The first option was listening in class and 134 (71.7%) students answered yes, while 53 (28.3%) answered no. Only 3 (0.02%) students skipped this survey item.

Another choice for how students learn best in online courses was viewing information provided in class such as PowerPoint presentations, videos, and lectures. For this question, 178 (94.7%) students responded yes to this item. 10 (5.3%) responded no that viewing information provided is best for their learning. Two (0.01%) students elected to skip this question. Another choice that students could choose was watching demonstrations. This option was chosen by 150

(80.2%) students said yes, that watching demonstrations was best for their learning while 37 (19.8%) students responded no, that watching demonstrations was not the best method for them to learn. Three (0.01%) students opted to skip this survey item.

Collaboration preferences. Students were also asked if working collaboratively is the way they learn best in online classes. For this option, 100 (53.2%) students responded yes, they learn best when working with others in some type of group setting while 88 (46.8%) students responded no, that they do not learn best while working collaboratively. Two (0.01%) students elected to skip this item on the survey. Another possible answer for how students learn best was by participating in discussions. For this option, 135 (71.8 %) answered yes to that they learn best when participating in discussions while 53 (28.2%) answered no that they do not learn best by participating in discussions. Only 2 (0.01%) students chose not to answer this particular survey item. Still another answer for how students learn best was other. This semi open-ended survey item actually had two choices. The first was simply other to which 107 (69.0%) students selected. The second choice was other (please specify) to which 48 (31.0%) students answered other (please specify). A total of 35 students (18.4%) skipped this survey item. (See Table 11 for a complete list of responses).

Table 11

Student learning preferences yes or no responses

Data for Questions 24 through 29			
	Yes	**No**	**Total**

Question	#	%	#	%	#	%
24. Best learning practices: listening in class	134	71.7%	53	38.4%	187	110.1%
25. Best learning practices: viewing information in class	178	94.7%	10	5.3%	188	100.0%
26. Best learning practices: watching demonstrations	150	80.2%	37	19.8%	187	100.0%
27. Best learning practices: collaboratively	100	53.2%	88	46.8%	188	100.0%
28. Best learning practices: discussions	135	71.8%	53	28.2%	188	100.0%
29. Best learning practices: other	107	69.0%	48	31.0%	155	100.0%

Transferability of Skills Learned in Online Courses

Another section of questions on the survey dealt with student attitudes around a variety of topics. One question asked students to describe which skills taught in online courses have they been able to use in their daily lives. Of those responding, 162 (85.3%) students provided a response to this question while 28 (14.7%) elected to skip this question. While this was an open-ended response item, and student responses varied significantly, some general themes arose in those responses. The most frequently reported applicable skill by students was some form of time management. Of those responding, 35 students (21.6%) of those who provided a response indicated that they had been able to utilize better time management in their real lives outside of the classroom, 22 students (13.6%) of those who responded to this question indicated that they had been able to implement both computer skills and social work skills in their daily lives, A

total of 21 students (13.0%) of those who responded to this question reported that they had been able to use both communication and organizational skills in their day-to-day lives 13 (8.0%) of students said they were able to use listening skills, 12 students (7.4%) said they were able to use research skills, nine students (5.6%) said they were able to use critical thinking skills, while eight students (4.9%) responded with "not applicable." Other themes commonly reported by students included respect, motivation, ethics, motivational interviewing, diversity, reading, collaboration, and independence. Other responses to this survey item included:

- "I am an older student, so this does not apply" (by 1 student);
- "all of the social work skills I learned are used daily in my work" (by 1 student);
- "I use all of my skills daily" (by 1 student);
- "none," (by 2 students);
- "I find the general classes interesting, but the major related classes are usually years behind current practices and research" (by 1 student);
- "I have gotten more ideas in class discussions than from the actual class itself; however, I am already working full time and have 15 years' experience in my field and in people management so I am atypical" (by 1 student);

Perceptions of synchronous online chats. The next question in the attitudes section of the survey asked students if there is anything they would like to add or perhaps change in their online courses. A total of 159 (83.7%) students responded to this particular item while 31 (16.3%) students opted to skip this question and 40 (25.2%) of the students who responded indicated that they would not like to add or change anything to their online courses. The remainder of the responses to this item varied greatly. There were, however, several themes of student responses that emerged. One of the main themes dealt with the synchronous chat

component of online courses. A summary of the positive and negative responses regarding the synchronous chat, and a representative sample of the student comments, are provided below. Positive comments typically revolved around the requirement of synchronous chat, the desire for additional chat opportunities, and the design of synchronous sessions. For example, here are some negative comments regarding the synchronous chat:

- "I would like to see if online chats could be a bit longer as it seems that the instructor is rushing through some of the information" (by 1 student);
- "I enjoy lectures and discussions during our weekly group chats that are followed with questions regarding assignments that are due" (by 1 student);
- "I like how the courses are set up by using video chat sessions";
- "maybe two online chats per week? One mandatory and a second optional??" (by 1 student);
- "more chat times throughout the week" (by 1 student)
- "more face to face video sessions… I honestly don't know if it will help or not" (by 1 student);
- "overall, I think the University has a great program, I learn well from watching the live videos, maybe more time with teachers online, instead of once a week, maybe twice for 30 min" (by 1 student)

Negative comments typically revolved around the requirement of synchronous chat, the desire for increased flexibility, and frustration with current policies. For example, here are some negative comments regarding the synchronous chat:

- “I don't believe that the chat sessions are effective. Sometimes there is too much material to cover in an hour, and sometimes the instructors ask more questions than actually teach.” (by 1 student);
- “I don’t prefer that we still have to meet online once a week I wanted to do online so that I could do it on my own time when I could and the weekly meetings are very destructive to my work and family schedule.” (by 1 student);
- “I have liked that the chats for piloted non- mandatory… (by 1 student);
- “then the chat should be posted where those that were not in the chat could refer back to the chat.” (by 1 student);
- “I would like to have prerecorded lectures instead of a class time and at class times have more of an office hour where students can specifically chat with the instructions.” (by 1 student);
- “online classes w/o the need to attend chat in real time, pre-recorded classes could be watched on my schedule, as I live outside the University’s time zone.” (by 1 student);
- “that not all classes be mandatory to attend” (by 2 students);
- “the chat sessions are not useful, in my opinion, in discussing with students at other institutions without "chat sessions," their learning is no better or worse and they have more time to devote to their class and outside life and work.” (by 1 student);
- “the requirement to be on the chat session is not productive or necessary, allowing students to have two-three excused absences and to review recordings would be much better, most of us in online are here because we have an already full life” (by 1 student);

Audio and Video components. Another popular topic for comments to this survey item was the use of audio and video components in the courses. Positive comments typically revolved

around the requirement of using audio, communication with instructors, and positive experiences in online settings. For example, here are some positive comments regarding the use of audio and video components:

- I don't mind video chats but it's nice when the teacher doesn't require all microphones on at once, that gets hectic." (by 1 student);
- it is vital that all instructors be required to use a microphone during class chat times, class chat times are the only times online learners have with the professor, asking questions and receiving assistance with difficult material is impossible when the instructor only uses typing to communicate, students become frustrated and it is a set up for failure...especially in upper division courses" (by 1 student);

Negative comments typically revolved around the requirement to utilize webcams, issues related to slow connections, getting kicked out of a chat room, and required audio and microphones. For example, here are some negative comments regarding the use of audio and video:

- "I do not like that some of my classes require me to have my webcam up, it causes my internet to slow down during class and occasionally kicks me out of class. I have to pause everyone else's videos during class as well so the audio still comes through clear" (by 1 student);
- "I just don't think there is any need for cameras if your participating" (by 1 student);
- "I wish teachers used videos and picture aids a lot more" (by 1 student);
- "I don't mind video chats but it's nice when the teacher doesn't require all microphones on at once, that gets hectic" (by 1 student);

- “sometimes it is hard to be on camera if my kids are home so when instructors make this a requirement, I feel stressed, I would make this optional” (by 1 student);
- “chats recorded by the instructor aside from the real time chat. This way the instructor can get to all points and not be interrupted by real time chat scenarios.” (by 1 student);
- “more instructional videos” (by 4 students);

Course organization. Another common thread of comments involved course organization and course structure. Negative comments typically revolved around the clarity and cohesiveness of due dates for assignments, flexibility on deadlines, workload pertinent to course level, and negative perceptions of required discussion board expectations. For example, here are some negative comments regarding course organization and areas that could experience some improvement:

- “clarity and cohesiveness in assignment due dates and course dashboard” (by 1 student);
- “flexible due dates, do not require students to use webcam, less class discussion and more professor presenting information” (by 1 student);
- “it would be helpful for each class to have same deadlines for completion of work. Some teachers give three days some give seven” (by 1 student);
- “length of amount of papers or size of papers/reading due. It is hard to squeeze so much in, especially for those who work and have families to care for” (by 1 student);
- “that all professor's put due dates next to each assignment in the "grades" section” (by 1 student);
- “discussion boards are often pointless and become a mindless chore.” (by 1 student);
- “discussion boards should not be required every week.”

- responded “fewer discussion boards on the big assessments week.”

Improved learning. Another question in the attitudes section asked student what they thought would improve their learning in their online courses. As was the case with the previous two questions, the fact that this item was open-ended, responses were quite varied. A total of 156 (82.1%) students responded while 34 (17.9%) skipped this question. 38 students (24.4%) of those who responded said either “nothing,” “none.” Or “n/a.” Among the other responses there seemed to be a few themes that emerged from students. Those themes included timeliness, feedback, audio and video, and the synchronous chat requirement. Responses included:

- “time and discipline, sometimes I wish I didn't have a fulltime job in order that I could give all my time to study, if I could turn back time, I would have stayed in school when I was just out of high school” (by 1 student);
- “time management skills” (by 2 students);
- “time.” (by 5 students);

Feedback was another commonly mentioned theme amongst student responses. Responses included:

- “faster feedback for assignments, projects, etc.” (by 1 student);
- “having more realistic feedback and in a more timely manner.” (by 1 student)
- “more feedback” (by 3 students);
- “timely grading to gauge how I am doing before the end of the semester when it's too late” (by 1 student);
- “check-ins, more intimate class space, real time grading and mutual respect.” (by 1 student);

- "Professors communicating in a timely matter and if students have a learning disability they need to understand that there are accommodations in place for a reason and to help that student more." (by 1 student);

Additional examples. Another question in the attitudes section and the last question of the survey asked students to list three examples of their experiences in online courses that they have not had the opportunity to discuss. While this survey item is listed as one question, it actually reports in three separate ways. Students were given the opportunity to provide three different examples. Students were not, however, required to provide all three even if they chose to answer the question as a whole. So, the question as a whole was answered by 88 students (46.3%) of the total sample and skipped by 102 students (53.7%). Example one also was answered by 88 students (46.3%) and skipped by 102 (53.7%) students. Example two was answered by 74 (38.9%) students while 116 (61.1%) students skipped it. Example three was answered by 65 students (34.2%) and skipped by 125 (65.8%) students.

As has been the case with all of the questions from the attitudes portion of the survey, the open-ended format of the question allowed for a wide variance in terms of student responses. Comments typically revolved around instructors being accessible and timely in communication, course accessibility and availability, the development of relationships and the cohort model of instruction. For example, here are some comments regarding the additional examples provided by students:

- “does not apply,” “I cannot think of any,” N/A,” “no comment,” “none,” “nothing,” “nothing comes to mind at this time,” “nothing I can think of,” or “nothing to add.” (31 students);
- “ I loved the cohort format,” (by 2 students)
- “I was able to develop relationships with some classmates which surprised me with it” (by 1 student)
- “sharing what I have learned with professor and classmates.” (by 1 student)
- “I would prefer there to be access to online classes during the day too, it shouldn't be exclusive to pm classes makes it harder for people who don't have the pleasure of a nine to five job setting,” (by 1 student);
- “all the instructors are very responsive to emails in a timely manner, sometimes within the hour, I know I can talk to any of my professors about any challenges or obstacles or questions,” (by 1 student);
- “I was not certain that online learning would be effective but it truly is when you meet in chat sessions as a group at a specified time,” (by 1 student);
- “I was originally scared of online classes; however, webinar has been and excellent way for me to get my degree and still feel like I'm in a classroom, webinar has been a vital tool in me attaining my degree.” (by 1 student);
- “if a chat time is mandatory, teachers who talk on video and switch thru slides should maybe ask questions throughout, a teacher simply talking while I'm trying to take notes does not help me learn” (by 1 student);
- “I would prefer face-to-face instruction but online classes work better with my schedule and other lifestyle issues,” (by 1 student);

How did different demographics influence students' preferences?

The final piece of the data analysis in this study was to compare different subgroups. Sub-groups were identified and selected based on a number of criteria. The first subgroup comparison that was selected was graduate students versus Bachelor's students. Graduate students were chosen for a number of reasons. First, all of our MSW students currently enrolled in the program elected to participate. Second, the MSW program is run differently than our other programs. One of the main differences is that it is a cohort model program. The third reason graduate students were identified as a subgroup, is that both audio and video through the use of webcams is a requirement for every course. As for Bachelor's level students, the author wanted to see how they compared to graduate students since that the two programs are run quite differently than one another.

The two other subgroups that were selected to compare were traditional versus non-traditional and first-generation college and non-first-generation college. These were chosen because of some pre-conceived notions from various people across campus and some assumptions that have been made which has in turn had some effects on policy. The goal of further analysis on these groups was to determine if in fact those assumptions are accurate or if the data would refute them by presenting alternative findings. Other groups were considered such as gender and ethnicity, however, the high percentage of Caucasian participants by race and the high percentage in female participants, it was decided that there might not be enough data to make any type of reasonable comparisons.

To compare these subgroups, seven of the survey questions were selected based on their overall scores on the survey as well as the results of the thematic analysis in the open-ended portion of the survey. Additionally, these seven questions were strategically chosen because of

the researchers interest in them based on the current instructional practices at the University. The seven instructional practices chosen were: (a) timeliness of communication from the instructor, (b) the inclusion of video which allows students to see the instructor, (c) engages in synchronous chat, (d) the timeliness of feedback, (e) ease of course navigation, (f) establishing sense of community in online settings, (g) and the use of rubrics on all assignments and projects. The next step in the process was to disaggregate the data for each of these seven questions for each of the subgroups. That process involved running a comparison highlighting each of the subgroups and exporting the data set into an Excel file. After each report had been exported, a new workbook was created and each of the subgroups data was compiled there with each question having its own unique tab. (See Table 12 for the results).

Table 12

Likert items divided by question and subgroup

	Not Valuable at All (1)		Of Little Value (2)		Neutral (3)		Somewhat Valuable (4)		Very Valuable (5)		Total	
13. Provides timely communication to student questions/concerns	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
First-Generation	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	6	8.7%	5	7.2%	58	84.1%	69	100.0%
Non-First-Generation	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	4	3.3%	12	9.9%	105	86.8%	121	100.0%
Traditional	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	6	8.3%	7	9.7%	59	39.9%	72	100.0%
Non-traditional	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	4	3.4%	10	88.1%	104	62.1%	118	100.0%
Graduate	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	2	7.7%	24	92.3%	26	100.0%
Under Graduate	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	10	6.1%	15	9.2%	139	84.8%	164	100.0%
16. Provides a video that allows me to hear and see the instructor	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
First-Generation	2	2.9%	4	5.8%	10	14.5%	12	17.4%	41	36.3%	69	100.0%

Non-First-Generation	2	1.7%	4	3.3%	27	14.2%	48	25.3%	62	51.2%	143	100.0%
Traditional	1	1.4%	3	4.2%	12	16.7%	18	25.0%	38	52.8%	72	100.1%
Non-traditional	3	2.5%	5	4.2%	15	12.7%	30	25.4%	65	55.1%	118	100.0%
Graduate	1	3.9%	0	0.0%	3	11.5%	3	11.5%	19	73.1%	26	100.0%
Under Graduate	3	1.8%	8	4.9%	24	27.4%	45	51.2%	84	51.2%	164	100.0%

Likert items divided by question and subgroup (continued)

	Not Valuable at All (1)		Of Little Value (2)		Neutral (3)		Somewhat Valuable (4)		Very Valuable (5)		Total	
17. Engages in "real time" chat sessions	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
First-Generation	2	2.9%	2	2.9%	12	17.4%	8	11.6%	45	36.3%	69	100.0%
Non-First-Generation	5	4.1%	5	4.1%	22	18.2%	30	24.8%	59	48.8%	121	100.0%
Traditional	3	4.2%	3	4.2%	16	22.2%	17	23.6%	33	45.8%	72	100.0%
Non-traditional	4	3.4%	4	3.4%	18	15.3%	21	17.8%	71	60.2%	118	100.1%
Graduate	1	3.9%	0	0.0%	4	15.9%	21	80.8%	26	100.0%	26	13.7%
Under Graduate	6	3.7%	7	4.3%	34	20.7%	34	20.7%	83	50.6%	164	86.3%
18. Provides timely feedback on assignments and projects	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
First-Generation	0	0.0%	1	1.5%	3	4.4%	8	11.6%	57	82.6%	69	36.3%
Non-First Generation	0	0.0%	0	6.0%	6	5.0%	15	12.4%	100	63.7%	121	63.7%
Traditional	0	0.0%	1	1.4%	6	8.3%	4	5.7%	61	84.7%	72	37.9%
Non-traditional	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	3	2.5%	19	16.1%	96	81.4%	118	62.1%

Graduate	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	3	11.5%	23	88.5%	23	14.7%
Under Graduate	0	0.0%	1	0.6%	9	5.5%	20	12.2%	134	81.7%	134	85.3%
19. Creates a course that is easy to navigate	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
First-Generation	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	6	8.7%	4	5.8%	59	85.5%	69	36.3%
Non-First-Generation	0	0.0%	1	0.8%	4	3.3%	18	14.9%	98	81.0%	98	63.7%
Traditional	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	7	9.7%	7	9.7%	58	80.6%	72	37.9%
Non-traditional	0	0.0%	1	0.9%	3	2.5%	15	12.7%	99	83.9%	118	62.1%
Graduate	0	0.0%	1	3.9%	1	3.9%	2	7.7%	22	84.6%	26	13.7%
Under Graduate	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	9	5.5%	20	12.2%	135	82.3%	164	86.3%

Likert items divided by question and subgroup (continued)

	Not Valuable at All (1)		Of Little Value (2)		Neutral (3)		Somewhat Valuable (4)		Very Valuable (5)		Total	
21. Provides grading rubrics or all assignments, projects, and discussions	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
First-Generation	0	0.0%	1.1.5	8.0%	11.6	12.0%	12	17.4%	48	69.6%	48	36.3%
Non-First-Generation	0	0.0%	1	0.8%	14	11.6%	20	16.5%	86	71.1%	121	63.7%
Traditional	0	0.0%	2	2.8%	12	16.7%	14	19.4%	44	61.1%	72	37.9%
Non-traditional	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	10	8.5%	18	15.3%	90	76.3%	118	62.1%
Graduate	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	1	3.9%	3	11.5%	22	84.6%	26	13.7%
Under Graduate	0	0.0%	2	1.2%	21	12.8%	29	17.7%	112	68.3%	164	86.3%
25. Reinforces a sense of community among course participants	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%

First-Generation	2	2.9%	2	2.9%	23	33.3%	16	26.2%	26	37.7%	69	36.3%
Non-First-Generation	1	0.8%	3	2.5%	33	27.3%	38	31.4%	46	38.0%	121	63.7%
Traditional	0	0.0%	3	4.2%	23	31.9%	20	27.8%	26	36.1%	72	37.8%
Non-traditional	3	2.5%	2	1.7%	33	28.0%	34	28.8%	46	39.0%	118	62.2%
Graduate	1	3.9%	0	0.0%	2	7.7%	7	26.9%	16	61.5%	26	13.7%
Under Graduate	2	1.2%	5	3.1%	54	32.9%	47	28.7%	56	34.1%	164	86.3%

The results of the subgroup analysis on question 13 that inquired about timely communication to student questions/concerns showed consistency across each of the groups. For each group the percentage of students who deemed timely communication to student questions/concerns over 90% of respondents. With no one responding that is was of little value or no value at all. Graduate students were particularly high on this area with over 92% of respondents saying timely feedback on questions was very valuable and 100% of students saying it was somewhat valuable or very valuable. The results for question 16 about the use of video that allows student to see and hear the instructor showed consistency across each of the groups. The one outlier was that graduate students scored significantly higher in the very valuable ranking. Scores in the other Likert items were comparable in each of the five categories with that one exception.

Other results from the subgroup analysis were mostly consistent when looking at the average scores and Likert response percentages for most of the items. Question 18 that involved the timely feedback on assignments on projects indicated that the overwhelming majority of students in each of the subgroups valued the practice. Each group was over 80% in the very valuable category for the item. Another interesting item that was observed in the data from

question 25 that dealt with sense of community was that the percentage of graduate students who deemed the importance of reinforcing a sense of community was significantly higher than the other subgroups. Another observation was that the graduate categories were higher on every item in terms of what they found very valuable with one exception. On question 19 that dealt with the ease of navigation to a course, 84.6% of graduate students found it to be very valuable where 85.5% of first-generation students reported the same.

One of the most interesting results from the subgroup analysis involved question 17 and the instructional practice of engaging in real-time synchronous chat. First generation students were noticeably higher than most of the other subgroups in the number of students who found the practice to be very valuable. Even more interesting was the number of graduate students who found engaging in real-time chat to be valuable. A total of 21 (80.8%) of students found it to be very valuable while 4 (15.4%) found it to be somewhat valuable. Only one graduate student categorized the synchronous chat in the neutral, little valuable, or not valuable at all categories.

Summary

This chapter detailed the results of the study. It started by describing the survey instrument and how it is structured. It then described the respondents comprising the sample who chose to participate in the study. It then provided the results for each of the 38 questions in the six categories of the survey: demographics, importance, strategies, academic advancement, preferences, and attitudes. The next chapter will examine the findings as well as present practical and theoretical implications of the study. Chapter Five will also identify limitations of the study, provide recommendations for future research and practice, and provide conclusions based on the findings of this study.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to research ways and methods that faculty establish instructor presence in an online learning environment in higher education. And, how those instructional practices impact students in these learning environments. More specifically, this study analyzed instructor presence by seeking answers to the following question: what online instructional practices do students perceive as valuable to their learning? This chapter provides an examination of the findings of the study, the limitations of the study, and the practical and broader theoretical implications, as well as recommendations for the institution based on the results of this study. Finally, the chapter concludes with suggestions for future research.

Examination of Findings

The findings of this study indicated that students perceive certain instructional practices as more valuable than others in an online setting. More specifically, that timely interaction with faculty and clear and navigable learning environments are of particular importance to students taking an online course. Of participants responding, 181 (95.3%) perceived *making course requirements clear* as being either somewhat valuable or very valuable. Overwhelmingly, 180 (94.7%) of students perceived *timely communication to student questions* to be either somewhat valuable or very valuable and no students indicated that it was of little value or not valuable at all. In terms of feedback, 180 (94.7%) of students perceived *timely feedback* to be either somewhat valuable or very valuable while creating a course that is easy to navigate was found either somewhat valuable or very valuable by 179 (94.2%) or participants.

The fact that students perceived timely feedback from instructors as valuable to student learning is consistent with existing literature (Gallien & Oomen-Early, 2008; Getzlaf, et. al, 2009; Pyke, Sherlock, 2010; Vonderwell, et. al, 2007; Young et. al, 2014); as is students

perceiving timely communication to student questions as valuable. Both instructional practices have been shown to have a significant impact in an online learning environment (Young, et.al, 2014) especially in the areas of both student performance and student satisfaction. It is also in alignment with research that ties the frequency, amount, type, and method of feedback to students' perceived satisfaction with an online learning experience (Kassinger, 2004; LaBarbera, 2013; Lear, et. al, 2009; Mandernach, et. al, 2009, McBrian, et. al, 2009; Morgan, 2011). It is also consistent with previous research that discusses the importance of online pedagogical practices that foster interaction, facilitate learning, and maintain enthusiasm and organization (Lewis & Abdul-Hamid, 2006).

Students found clear expectations and easily navigable course environments to be perceived as valuable to student learning in online courses. This finding is also consistent with existing literature in the areas of online pedagogy, online course facilitation, and online course design. Specifically, it is found in the research that discusses the necessary components for maintaining successful online learning experiences (Roby et.al, 2013); successful course facilitation and course design (Kim & Bonk, 2006); and reinforcing, engaging, and motivating students in an online learning environment (Kiriakidis, 2008). It is also consistent with previous research on the differences between the needs of learners in face-to-face settings and the differences in the environments, and the pedagogical techniques most effective at meeting the needs of online students (Kennette & Redd, 2015). This finding is also in alignment with research that discusses the importance of instructors making clear course requirements and responding to students' needs (Sheridan & Kelly, 2010).

Fewer students perceived utilizing discussion boards, reinforcing a sense of community, and engaging in real-time chat sessions to be valuable. Only 67.0% of students identified

utilizing discussion boards as being perceived as valuable while 33.0% chose neutral, of little value or not valuable at all. Reinforcing a sense of community among course participants was recognized as valuable by only 65.0% or respondents while 35.0% of students chose neutral, of little value, or not valuable at all. Students identifying engaging in real-time chat, 142 (74.4%) found sessions as valuable while 52 (25.6%) of students chose neutral, of little value, or not valuable at all.

The fact that a high percentage of students did not identify the utilization of discussion boards as being valuable to their learning was unexpected. Previous research on the benefits of using discussion boards because of their convenience and the fact that they do not allow overbearing students to dominate the conversation (Swan, 2003), would suggest that this item would not have had so many students identify it as not having perceived value, as would research on the prevalence of the usage of discussion boards and their popularity (Costley, 2015). This popularity is largely attributed to the fact that discussion forums allow for every learner to have the opportunity to equally participate and interact with the faculty member (Vonderwell, et. al, 2007). What is not clear from the results of the present study is how discussion boards are being setup currently in University's online courses and how individual faculty members are using them. More specifically it is unclear how faculty are designing discussion board prompts, expectations for participation, and the amount of faculty feedback on current discussion board assignments. While existing literature is divided on the levels of instructor participation in discussion forums and the impact that has on student participation (Mazzolini, Madison, 2007; Murphy, Former, 2014) further clarification about the practices of University faculty are needed to see what impact, if any, instructor practices have on student perceptions of the value of discussion boards in online courses to student learning?

Also surprising was the high number of participants who were neutral or found little or no value in the instructional practice of reinforcing a sense of community among course participants indicating a substantial number of students did not perceive this instructional practice as being valuable to their learning in an online setting. This finding is not consistent with existing literature that discusses the importance that the role community can have in both building and sustaining productive learning environments (Shea, et. al, 2005). It is also not consistent with research on the importance of a student's sense of community (SoC) in an online setting (Shackelford & Maxwell, 2012) or research discussing the importance of instructor immediacy in online contexts (Mathieson & Leafman, 2014). Nor is it aligned with research indicating the importance of connectedness in a learning community that is well documented in the literature (Aragon, 2003; Picciano, 2002; Schutt, Allen & Laumakis, 2009; Tu, McIssac, 2002; Wise, et. al, 2004).

The researcher speculates that this finding is indicative of students not necessarily understanding the terminology of Sense of Community and what all is involved of the concept of SoC in an online course environment. It is possible that the types of interactions that establish SoC in an online setting are not well identified by students in online courses. Perhaps their value and importance are not fully understood by students and the deliberateness of faculty and administration to ensure those practices are included in online courses are not fully understood or appreciated.

The high number of students who indicated that they were neutral or found little or no value in engaging in real-time chat sessions is inconsistent with the literature in synchronous sessions that discusses the evidence indicating that online students overwhelmingly find considerable value in synchronous chat sessions in online courses (Scheuermann, 2010). It is

also inconsistent with other research that indicated that students in general had favorable reactions to the use of synchronous elements being used in online courses (McBrien, et. al, 2009). It is also inconsistent with research that discusses how synchronous learning sessions help students feel like participants as opposed to isolates (Hrastinski, 2008). This finding, however, is in alignment with research that suggests that online students to not place much importance on synchronous face-to-face communication (Sheridan & Kelly, 2010), as well as with research that identifies online students' hesitation to participate in courses with synchronous sessions because of the potential threat to two attractive features of traditional online education: convenience and anonymity (Park & Bonk, 2007).

The researcher was not surprised that the number of students who chose neutral, of little value, or not valuable at all on synchronous chat. The University is unique in that each online course is required to host a one-hour synchronous chat session during the week. Attendance at chat is mandatory for students to receive credit for the course. This has long been a heavily debated practice at the institution with strong feelings and opinions on both sides of the argument. Supporters of the practice cite how it ensures quality in the degree programs, builds sense of community, gives a more personalized experience, and encourages retention. Critics of the instructional practice cite that it is inhibits the recruitment of new online students and that it is inconvenient for both students and faculty to attend a weekly session.

As enrollment numbers in the online program have decreased over the last few semesters, there has been considerable and ongoing discussion about ways to increase enrollment in the future. The Office of Admissions and the Enrollment Management department cite the main reason that students do not choose the University is because of our required synchronous chat and that students find it restrictive, inconvenient, burdensome, and generally not being perceived

as valuable to their learning. Because of this, the decision was made to pilot a non-mandatory chat option in a limited number of courses. Some of the open-ended response items reviewed by the researcher reflect this initiative.

This study also found that a majority of participants perceived the use of video that allows students to hear and see the instructor to be valuable. In terms of the average total score, this item fell towards the middle of the Likert-scale questions on the survey. Given the nature of the program, however, and frequent discussion about the use of video in online classes, the researcher thought it prudent to discuss further given the potential practical implications on the program as a whole. Of the respondents participating in the survey, 151 (79.5%) indicated that providing a video that allows them to hear and see the instructor was perceived as either somewhat valuable or very valuable. This is consistent with existing literature that shows the use of video can help students not become disengaged in a course and overall isolated (Underdown & Martin, 2016). It is also consistent with research that suggests that instructors who incorporate video in online classes receive higher feedback scores on course evaluations (Underdown & Martin, 2016). This finding is also in alignment with research that shows the use of personalized video content in online courses has a positive impact on student engagement, student satisfaction, and performance (Draus, et. al, 2014). This finding is also consistent with existing research on the use of video and establishing social presence in online contexts (Borup, et. al, 2014). It is also aligned with research that discusses the need for students in online settings to have a high-level of relatedness with instructors and how the incorporation of video components can enrich instructor-student interactions (Bhat et al, 2015).

Subgroups

After reviewing the data for these seven questions the following observations were made. First, for the question regarding timely communication from instructors to student questions or concerns there seemed to be consensus across all six of the subgroups that it was perceived as valuable to student learning in an online setting. It seemed particularly important to graduate students of which 92.3% indicated it was perceived as very valuable. The fact that each of the subgroups perceived this particular instructional practice as valuable was not surprising based on a review of the overall data and thematic analysis of the open-ended response items. Timely communication was one of the most consistently referenced topics across a number of open-ended response items.

Question seventeen of the survey dealt with engaging in real-time synchronous chat sessions. This topic was one of specific interest to the researcher given the policy that all University courses have a synchronous chat session at least once a week and the amount of controversy generated in considering a change by moving to a new policy. There has been considerable discussion over this requirement with many feeling strongly in support of it while an equal, if not greater, number of individuals have been actively advocating for eliminating the requirement and amending the policy. Analysis of the subgroups on synchronous chat showed ninety-six percent of graduate students said real-time sessions were perceived as either somewhat valuable or very valuable while only one graduate student said they were not valuable at all.

This could be a result of the cohort model approach that is utilized in the graduate MSW program where all of the students take the same courses each semester with one another and progress through the program at the same pace. From that standpoint it would make sense that perhaps graduate students would find a way to interact with students they have more exposure to

throughout the week to value synchronous sessions more than students from the other subgroups analyzed. This could perhaps further be explained given that the requirement for the MSW program's chat sessions is that each participant uses a webcam and microphone during the chat session. The MSW program is the only academic program on campus that has this requirement for all courses in the program required for graduation.

Question nineteen of the survey referenced creating a course that is easy to navigate. The averages for this item were again fairly close with little variation across the six sub-groups. While that was not necessarily surprising, the fact that the means were so high to this question is referenced here because of the high scores in relation to some of the other instructional practices not related to communication. The high average across the sub-groups suggest that an easily navigated course is comparable in perceived value to students as clear and timely communication in general and is worth further consideration as an instructional practice in online courses.

Implications

This study has both practical and theoretical implications for online education in the future.

Practical Implications. This study holds immediate implications for the university under study. Specifically, this study provided answers to the research question: what online instructional practices do students perceive as valuable to their learning? It also provided valuable information about the preferences of current online students in terms of their learning and experience in online courses at The University. This study also provided information about the current student population in terms of demographics.

The answers to the research question what online instructional practices do students perceive as valuable to their learning should closely be reviewed and evaluated by those charged with making decisions regarding educational policy at the institution. Faculty, staff, and members of administration should review the results of this study before making, adjusting, or changing University policy when it comes to its' distance education program. It is certain that many faculty and staff will be surprised by some of the results based on existing attitudes and assumptions about the realities of what students' value. Many individuals across campus are of a mind that certain policies and procedures are sound and not in need of review. These policies, however, were established out of necessity with an emphasis on expediency to move the online program forward as quickly as possible as opposed to making or establishing procedures and benchmarks based on any form of data gathered by the University.

The author of this study suggests that these results should be used as the baseline for establishing some best-practice suggestions and minimal expectations for course design and facilitation for online courses at the University. There has long been discussion for establishing benchmarks in "what a quality online course at the University looks like. As has there been about minimum expectations for adjunct, part-time, and full-time faculty when it comes to policies, procedures, and practices as it pertains to the chat session. Using the results of this study will provide University officials data to inform them as to how to structure some of those expectations moving forward.

This study also provided information about the current experiences of online students at the University. These too need to be taken into consideration as part of the planning process for the evaluation of the effectiveness of the online program. These considerations should be a part

of the strategic planning of the Institution and integrated into the current delivery of online programs at the Institution.

Recommendations. The first recommendation for the University would be to make a decision on the synchronous versus asynchronous chat sessions in undergraduate level online courses debate. While the inclusion of "mandatory" weekly synchronous chat sessions has long been the practice at the University, a recent review of Curriculum Committee minutes, from the group that is responsible for maintaining the curriculum and establishing academic University policy, revealed that it in fact has never been officially approved as policy. In other words, it has essentially become policy because that has been the collective practice of program faculty, but never actually approved. The original online learning policy stated that "opportunities for student-to-student-to faculty interaction are required in all online courses. These interactions may be synchronous (as in chat sessions), asynchronous (as in discussion boards), or both asynchronous and synchronous." A proposed change to the online learning policy presented at a later time was: "opportunities for student-to-student-to faculty interaction are required in all online courses and must be synchronous. The chat sessions are scheduled for one hour each week of the class duration with the exception of possible holiday conflict as noted on the printed online schedule. The holiday conflicts may use an asynchronous format at the discretion of the course lecturer, but synchronous is highly recommended, especially when it falls early in the class schedule. A combination of synchronous and asynchronous activities within a course is strongly suggested." Clarification on what the online learning policy is regarding the requirement of synchronous chat is of paramount importance for the institution moving forward.

To address the real-time chat issue at the undergraduate level, the author suggests for the institution to continue to offer opportunities for students to connect with faculty both

synchronously and asynchronously. As far as the chat session is concerned, continue to follow the practice that participation in the chats is mandatory. The key difference to this recommendation is that the students' participation could be either synchronously or asynchronously. For example, continue to have faculty hold a chat session and record the meeting. After the chat session is over, faculty could post the URL to the course homepage in the LMS for students who were unable to attend. Students could then access it when it is convenient for them and still participate in class. Students have the option of doing what works best for them without being penalized if they are unable to be there in real-time. This recommendation has the potential to make the bachelor's level program at the University to be more marketable to students who are looking to enroll in a quality online program that has a high-level of flexibility in its offerings. Many students are drawn to online education programs because of the convenience they can offer in terms of work schedules, family obligations, and other personal responsibilities. By allowing students to participate in the chat asynchronously, the potential student pool for the recruitment of new students is significantly expanded.

Another reason that keeping the weekly chat session, but altering the synchronous attendance requirement, is a prudent move is that there was considerable variance in students' perception of the value of this instructional practice. As previously stated, there were a considerable number of students who did not find the practice to be valuable. There were also, however, a significant number of students who did find the synchronous sessions to be valuable. By allowing for multiple types of participation in the synchronous session, The University will provide options for both sets of learners and better meet the needs of students regardless of their preference towards synchronous meetings.

For the MSW program, the recommendation regarding synchronous chat is quite different. For this program, the recommendation is to continue to utilize the required synchronous weekly chat sessions. While the results of this study do not definitively show the reasons why the synchronous component resonates so much with graduate students, it is clear that the inclusion of the weekly synchronous chat is something that graduate students perceive as valuable at a high level. The fact that this program utilizes a cohort model could suggest that this type of model values synchronous connection more than other forms of delivery. Another recommendation for the MSW program would be to inquire from graduate students in current and future cohorts more about why this particular instructional practice is perceived as valuable to them as more information is needed to distinguish the needs of students in cohort versus non-cohort programs.

Another recommendation pertaining to online chat sessions is to inventory how different instructors in different areas as well as across course-levels utilize the chat session. In other words, how it is executed in various classes and with different instructors? The platform to facilitate the chat session is Adobe Connect. Adobe Connect has the functionality to allow for the "host" to use text, video, audio, or a combination of the three for all of the users. While the expectation at The University is for the instructor to use at least video and audio and have students use at least the text chat feature, it is just an expectation and not a requirement. As such, there exists significant variance in how instructors structure the chat sessions with using only text chat and others having students use audio and some video and audio. The author recommends looking at each course and each faculty member to identify differences in pedagogy. Once this information is gathered and assembled, talk with faculty about their experiences in the chat and discuss the advantages and disadvantages of differing approaches. Lastly, use the information

gathered in these discussions to share the experiences of faculty with others about the advantages and disadvantages of each.

Since a clear and easy-to-navigate course was perceived as valuable by students on the survey, another recommendation for the University would be to modify the current instructional design process for new courses and establish updated guidelines for course design and redesign. Presently, in most cases, there is very little interaction on the part of faculty in the course design process. Typically, what happens when a new course is going to be written is that a faculty member sends a copy of the course syllabus to a third-party vendor the contracted by the University and a course designer begins to populate a course shell with the material contained in the syllabus. After the course is written it is subject to a technical inspection where a support specialist goes through the course to see if there are any bad links or resources that do not load properly when accessed. While inspected for functionality, there are no measures in place for navigability. Someone needs to review new courses to make sure that they are designed clearly and easy for students to navigate. Also, standards need to be established to ensure that the course design process includes appropriate and required protocols to ensure that all University courses adhere to ADA requirements and meets the needs of students with disabilities who require accommodations to be successful in an online learning environment.

Similarly, the process for course redesign also needs significant improvement. While most courses get modified and slightly tweaked every semester, there does not presently exist a procedure for reviewing a course to see what improvements needs to be made. The University needs to establish some benchmarks for course design principles that need to be present in all of its courses and empower someone or a group of people to review courses on a regular basis to ensure compliance in all of the courses the Institution offers. Courses that do not meet the

established benchmarks should be redesigned with faculty taking on the role of subject matter expert and working closely with the instructional design team to ensure that future offerings are consistent with the instructional practices that online students perceive as valuable to their learning.

Another recommendation based on the findings of the study is for the Institution to create and implement a quality control system that reviews the online program as a whole. With consideration of the instructional practices that students' value (see Table 13), as well as the principles of quality programs identified by the Quality Matters metric and the Online Learning Consortium standards, the University should create a group that is charged with creating and maintaining a list of "best practices" guidelines that sets benchmarks for course delivery standards, expectations for course pedagogy, and assessment procedures. Once created, this system needs to be implemented across the entire online program and monitored regularly to ensure consistency in each of the academic programs at the institution that reflect the instructional practices that online students perceive as valuable to their learning. Table 13 provides a list of instructional practices that students identified as valuable that should be included in future online courses.

Table 13

Suggested Practices

COI Instructional Practices	Example	Support
Social Presence	Provides timely communication to student questions	4.81 average on a 5 scale 85.8% of students identified it as very valuable
	Provides timely feedback on assignments and projects	4.77 average on a 5 scale 82.7% of students identified it as very valuable
	Creates a learning environment that is welcoming to different opinions	4.51 average on a 5 scale 88.8% of students identified it as either very valuable or valuable
Teaching Presence	Makes course requirements clear	4.84 average on a 5 scale 89.5% of students identified it as very valuable
	Creates a course that is easy to navigate	4.76 average on a 5 scale 82.6% of students identified it as very valuable
	Provides quality resources	4.48 average on a 5 scale 87.4% of students identified as very valuable or valuable

	Provides grading rubrics for all assignments, projects, and discussions	4.57 average on a scale 87.3% of students identified as very valuable or valuable
Cognitive Presence	Provides timely communication to student questions	4.81 average on a 5 scale 85.8% of students identified it as very valuable
	Creates a learning environment that is welcoming to different opinions	4.51 average on a 5 scale 88.8% of students identified it as either very valuable or valuable

The author would also like to recommend that University administration make strides in the training of all faculty who teach in the online program. Currently expectations exist regarding the training requirements of faculty who teach online, but not requirements. These expectations vary between full-time, part-time, and adjunct faculty. While the amount of training provided by the University in relation to online pedagogy and assessment is more than adequate, the fact that clear requirements for training in each of the groups is not mandated is problematic since attendance at and participation in these trainings is not required. The lack of required training guidelines has led to relatively low attendance at the training sessions that focus on online instructional practices and pedagogy. University administration, in consultation with

the faculty, need to establish and maintain benchmarks in terms of how much training is required for faculty members who teach in the online program.

Last year, the expectation was set that every adjunct faculty member who teaches online would participate in at least one professional development training related to online pedagogy, course facilitation, course design, or assessment. Significant discussion took place about the importance of training for faculty, especially those who have not previously taught online, however, no decision was made towards making training required as opposed to leaving this area as an expectation versus a requirement. Mandated training for all faculty who teach online needs to be a requirement. A policy for all categories of faculty teaching online needs to be established to determine, and document, the training that faculty are participating in with regards to online pedagogy, course design, communication, and assessment. Participating in training would encourage faculty to incorporate in the classes they offer the types of instructional practices that students at the University perceive as valuable to their learning in online courses.

A final recommendation would be to increase the use of faculty-generated video in online courses at The University. The results of this study showed that close to 80% of students surveyed perceived the use of video in courses as being either somewhat or very valuable to their learning. A set of benchmarks or guidelines on the inclusion of video should be developed and implemented in all online courses. Additional training on the creating, editing, and sharing instructional-based video should be provided to offer current and future faculty the tools and skills required to implement this instructional practice in their courses.

***Theoretical Implications*.** In addition to the practical application, this study holds broader theoretical implications for online education and the notion of instructor presence in online settings. The results support the literature that discusses the Community of Inquiry framework

that identifies three core elements that are essential for a successful learning experience: social presence, cognitive presence, and teaching presence (Garrison, et al., 2000). The results are also consistent with the research that discusses ways in which instructors can establish instructor presence in an online setting such as timely communication, and feedback (Frederickson, et. al,; Ladyshewski, 2013; Lear et al., 2009; Picciano, 2002; Stone & Chapman, 2006). This finding is also aligned with research that discusses the importance of feedback to students' overall satisfaction with a learning experience (Lee & Rha, 2009) and the significant role communication has on students perceived satisfaction with overall course satisfaction (LaBarbera, 2013; Shea et al., 2006). This finding holds implications for faculty teaching in online programs demonstrating the importance of clear, timely communication and feedback and how those instructional practices are perceived as valuable to their learning.

Additionally, this study reinforces the importance that course design plays in a successful online learning experience. This finding holds implications for faculty, instructional designers, and administrators of online programs charged with delivering high-quality educational experiences. It reiterates that teaching online is different than teaching in a traditional face-to-face format and that the needs of learners are quite different. This study should serve as a reminder that the environments are not the same and that additional training in the area of online course design and pedagogy is critical (Kennette & Redd, 2015). This study also reinforces the importance that an effective online learning experience begins with the role of the instructor shifting to a facilitator and that all course activities need to be student-centered (Shie, et. al, 2008).

The results of this study were congruent with the current literature on synchronous learning components being incorporated in online environments which is itself mixed at best.

Many of the comments support existing research that incorporating synchronous elements in online settings is met favorably by students and generally appreciated (McBrien et al., 2009; Scheurmman, 2010). Other comments, however, represented a different strand of the literature that cites the inconvenience of synchronous elements of instruction which causes its inclusion to be an unwanted element for those interested in pursuing education online (Park & Bonk, 2007).

Limitations of Study

This study was restricted to one, private, Catholic, liberal arts, Southern university. As such, the results of this study may be more applicable to similar or comparable institutions in terms of size, affiliation, scope, mission, and geographic orientation. The study investigated students taking online courses towards either an Associate's, Bachelor's or Master's degree or towards a certificate program.

The sample size of this study was relatively small. The total sample size was 190 students. The small sample size was the product of several unforeseen and unavoidable circumstances. Unfortunately, a number of academic year-ending surveys were distributed prior to, or concurrently with, the researchers survey. This may have contributed to a smaller number of participants completing the survey. Several of the open-ended student comments indicated that they were tired of taking surveys and simply "surveyed out."

Another limitation to the study involved the issue of reliability. Given the nature of the study, there was not opportunity to issue the survey more than one time. A common measure for reliability in a study is test-retest reliability. That form of accountability was not in place in this study because respondents only had one opportunity to respond to the survey. Also, since there

was only one researcher, there was not the opportunity for any provisions for inter-rater-reliability, which could have increased the reliability amongst the thematic coding of the open-ended themes drawn in terms of consistency of the responses offered. That said, the internal consistency between comparable items across a number of related survey items provides for a confident amount of reliability in the results of the study.

In terms of validity, since this was not a correlation study, measures of criterion validity, or discriminant validity were not appropriate. The researcher relied exclusively on measures of face validity. While this decision has its limitations, the survey instrument has been used in a number of published studies measuring comparable types of information with positive results. Given the nature of the survey questions, the other studies where it has been used, and the accompanying results and analysis, the instrument seems to have an adequate level of validity that assures it is measuring the intended variables.

Suggestions for Further Research

This study investigated the instructional practices that students perceive as valuable to their learning in online courses. There are future studies that could both validate the results of this study and further the results of this research. Below is a list of suggestions for further research in the areas of instructor presence and online instructional practices that students perceive as valuable in online settings.

1. Replicating the study at an institution with less commonality than the studied institution would provide additional validation to the results of this study. This study focused on one institution with a distinct size, focus, affiliation, scope, mission, and geographic

orientation. Replicating the study at a different type of institution would provide additional validation of the results of this study.

2. A larger sample size would provide additional validation to the results of this study if it was to be replicated. While sent to all students at the time, the sampling frame was small, and the response rate was low. Further research with additional online student populations could be conducted to determine what instructional practices students perceive as valuable in online courses.
3. Further research of incorporating synchronous components to online learning environment settings is strongly encouraged. At present, there seems to be disparities in the literature as to whether it is advantageous from a student satisfaction and performance standpoint versus the downfalls their inclusion has from a recruitment and retention standpoint.
4. Further research in the area of the appropriate class size for online courses is also strongly encouraged. There is little, if any, existing literature on what number of students in an online course is best for student learning. As online education expands in its breadth, and its relevance, more information in terms of the best practices for online course size is needed.
5. A study focused on the difference between a graduate-level, cohort-model format of online instruction versus that of an Associate's or Baccalaureate non-cohort degree program is strongly advised. The difference in the two models warrants additional research to determine what variances exist in the two formats, and what, if any, program differences exist. At the time of this study's publication, there seemed to be limited

research in the literature that discussed the distinction between both types of academic programs.

Conclusion

Results suggested that students perceived as valuable the instructional practice of making course requirements clear. Students reported that they also perceived as valuable the instructional practice of instructors providing timely communication to students' questions/concerns. Participants also recognized that timely feedback on assignments and projects is valuable to student learning. Students perceived as valuable the instructional practice of creating a course that is easy to navigate. While some students reported the use of discussion forums to be perceived as valuable, this practice was not reported to be perceived as valuable as the aforementioned instructional practices. The same was true for establishing a sense of community in an online course as well as engaging in a real-time synchronous chat sessions.

Subgroup analysis of various student groups showed consistency across populations with a few exceptions. Graduate students consistently scored higher across multiple items on the survey. The consistency of the results across the entire population, and various subgroups, indicate a uniformity of the instructional practices that students, at all levels, and in all classifications, validate what instructional practices students perceive as valuable to their learning in online courses. Consequently, the results of this study are important by providing recommended instructional practice guidelines that have the potential to improve online course design for the University, other comparable online educational programs, and other institutions striving to determine what their students perceive as valuable in terms of online instructional practices. Those guidelines could possibly improve online course design and facilitation for students enrolled in online courses, while also understanding the particular culture of the audience to which online education is planned, structured, designed, formatted, facilitated, and delivered.

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Appendix A

Category	Prompt/Item
Demographics	What is your age?
Demographics	Have you ever served in the military?
Demographics	Are you a first generation college student?
Demographics	Do you consider yourself a traditional or non-traditional college student?
Demographics	What online courses have you taken at Brescia?
Demographics	What is your level of standing at Brescia?
Most Important	What are the 5 most important instructional strategies for your success in an online course. (You may use strategies from the list below, or add others).
Strategies	Below is a list of instructional practices that instructors of online courses may engage in whe each strategy listed, rate its level of value to your learning as a student when enrolled in an o scale provided below.
	Utilizes discussion board
	Provides timely communication to student questions/concerns
	Provides quality resources (i.e. databases, journal articles, supplemental video, etc.)
	Creates a learning environment that is welcoming to differing opinions
	Provide a video that allows me to hear and see the instructor
	Engages in "real time" chat sessions
	Provides timely feedback on assignments and projects
	Creates a course that is easy to navigate
	Makes course requirements clear
	Provides grading rubrics for all assignments, projects and discussions
	Provides topics and content that is relevant to me
	Provides content that is challenging to me
	Allows me to have control over my own learning
	Reinforces the development of a sense of community among course participants
Academic	Describe whether you feel your knowledge has improvement within the last year

Category	Prompt/Item
Preference	How do you learn best? Listening in Class Viewing information provided in class (i.e. PowerPoints, Videos, lectures, etc.) Watching demonstrations Collaboratively Participating in discussions Other (please specify)
Preference	Do you prefer group work or individual work?
Attitudes	Which skill taught in courses have you been able to use in your daily life? Is there anything you would like to add or change in your courses? What do you think would improve your learning in your courses? List three examples of your experiences in online courses that you have not had opportunity to discuss

Variable	Response Text	Export Value	Response Value
Age	>-18	1	1
	19-24	2	2
	25-30	3	3
	31-35	4	4
	36-42	5	5
	43-<	6	6
Background	Yes/No		
Background	Yes/No		
Background	Traditional / Non-Traditional		
OnlineCourses	(Open Ended)		

DegreeProgram	Freshman	1	1
	Sophomore	2	2
	Junior	3	3
	Senior	4	4
	Graduate	5	5
MostImportant1	(Open-Ended)		
MostImportant2	(Open-Ended)		
MostImportant3	(Open-Ended)		
MostImportant4	(Open-Ended)		
MostImportant5	(Open-Ended)		

n teaching a course. For
nline course using the

DailyDiscussions	(Value scale)
WeeklyDiscussions	(Value scale)
Resources	(Value scale)
Welcoming	(Value scale)
InstructorVideo	(Value scale)
EngageChat	(Value scale)
TimelyFeedback	(Value scale)
EasyNavigate	(Value scale)
ClearRequirements	(Value scale)
ProvideRubrics	(Value scale)
RelevantTopics	(Value scale)
ChallengingContent	(Value scale)
ControlLearning	(Value scale)
ReinforceCommunity	(Value scale)

Variable	Response Text	Export Value	Response Value
	Other	0	5
PreferLearnOther	Other (please specify)		
LearnListening	Yes	1	1
	No		0
LearnViewing	Yes	2	2
	No		0
LearnWatching	Yes	3	3
	No		0
LearnCollaboratively	Yes	4	4
	No		0
LearnDiscussions	Yes	5	5
	No		0
LearnOther	(Open-Ended)		
PreferWork	Individually	1	1
	In groups of 2	2	2
	In groups of 4-5	3	3
	Other		4
PreferWorkOther	Other (please specify)		
SchoolsSchool	(Open-Ended)		
ChangeSchool	(Open-Ended)		
ImproveLearning	(Open-Ended)		
ImproveLearning	(Open-Ended)		

JEFFREY JAMES BARNETTE

EDUCATION

Indiana University – Bloomington, Indiana
Ed.D in Instructional Systems Technology,
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Dissertation: Instructor presence in online education: An analysis of student perceptions and performance

University of Southern Indiana – Evansville, Indiana
Master of Science in Education with Instructional Technology Emphasis – May 2010
GPA.: 4.0 / 4.0

University of Southern Indiana – Evansville, Indiana
Bachelor of Science in Social Science Education – May 2004
Recipient of the Scholarship The Gustav and Eleanor Hoos Memorial Scholarship
GPA.: 3.87 / 4.0

PROFESSIONAL LICENSURE

Indiana Professional Educator License: World Civilization, United States History, Economics, grades 5 – 12 Computer Education 6-12 **License #1564975**

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Brescia University – Owensboro, Kentucky January 2014 – Present
Associate Academic Dean (October 2015 – Present)

- Serve as Chief Academic Officer for Online programs
- Assist the Vice President for Academic Affairs with academic coordination and direction of Brescia University online programs
- Serve on all faculty search committees
- Supervise the Director of the Ursuline Center for Teaching and Learning
- Monitor progress and implementation of Title III Sip Grant programs and initiatives
- Analyze GER needs of online students and project the most probably needed GER and elective courses for scheduling
- Work with and support faculty teaching in the online programs
- Make recommendations for adding course sections and/or cancellation of courses
- Develop consistent start and end dates for University schedule
- Work with LMS provider to ensure consistent delivery of online courses
- Review online polices for consistency with other University policies
- Identify and reify “the Brescia Difference” and the Ursuline Educational Heritage in the OL programs through a variety of orientation/continuing education modules and other formats as appropriate
- Recruit adjunct faculty members
- Coordinate student services for online students
- Work with BUonline regarding recruitment and registration processes

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE – CONTINUED

Brescia University – Owensboro, Kentucky
Associate Academic Dean – Continued Experience (October 2015 – Present)

- Facilitate new-faculty orientation sessions
- Work with University IT staff to identify appropriate instructional technology and incorporate needed purchases into annual budgets
- Conduct quality review of online programs, courses, and faculty members
- Member of President's Strategic Planning Council, Dean's Council, Institutional Computing Committee, Area Program Review Committee, Care Committee, and the University Building and Design Committee

Brescia University – Owensboro, Kentucky
Associate Academic Dean & Director of Instructional Technology (January 2014 – October 2015)

- Served as Chief Academic Officer for Online programs
- Assisted the Vice President for Academic Affairs with academic coordination and direction of Brescia University online programs
- Analyzed GER needs of online students and project the most probably needed GER and elective courses for scheduling
- Worked with and support faculty teaching in the online programs
- Made recommendations for adding course sections and/or cancellation of courses
- Developed consistent start and end dates for University schedule
- Worked with LMS provider to ensure consistent delivery of online courses
- Reviewed online polices for consistency with other University policies
- Identified and reify "the Brescia Difference" and the Ursuline Educational Heritage in the OL programs through a variety of orientation/continuing education modules and other formats as appropriate
- Recruited adjunct faculty members
- Coordinated student services for online students
- Worked with BUonline regarding recruitment and registration processes
- Facilitated new-faculty orientation sessions
- Worked with University IT staff to identify appropriate instructional technology and incorporate needed purchases into annual budgets
- Conducted quality review of online programs, courses, and faculty members
- Developed trainings and resources related to instructional technology and how it can be used in delivering quality learning experiences
- Member of President's Strategic Planning Council, Dean's Council, Institutional Computing Committee, Area Program Review Committee, Care Committee, and the University Building and Design Committee

Evansville Vanderburgh School Corporation – Evansville, Indiana June 2005 – December 2013
Computer Education & Digital Learning Teacher, Technology Coordinator, and Webmaster – Perry Heights Middle School (August 2012 – December 2013)

- Designed computer education and digital learning curriculum based on the NETS standards for technology and 21st Century skills.
- Demonstrated excellent classroom management skills and passion for teaching.
- Maintained continuous communication with staff, administration and parents regarding student progress via class website, online grade book system, and email.
- Utilized Promethean Board, microphone, digital cameras, clickers, podcassting, wiki's, blogs, course management software, discussion boards, simulations, audio editing, video editing, and WebQuests.
- Served as the school's computer coordinator and Website Administrator, a role which involves designing and maintaining the school's website, adding content in all areas, and managing individual teacher WebPages.
- Created, prepared, and facilitated professional development for staff.
- Assisted teachers in incorporating technology into instruction.
- Hand selected to cohort responsible for the development of 21st century learning experiences in media-rich environments by providing support and expertise to other educators as the Evansville Vanderburgh School Corporation implements its new 1:1 initiative.
- Athletic Coach for girls' basketball and track teams and co-ed golf league.

Evansville Vanderburgh School Corporation– Evansville, Indiana
Social Studies Teacher – Perry Heights Middle School (June 2005 – August 2012)

- Assumed full responsibility for all 8th grade U.S. History courses consisting of 6 classes with over 165 students, including those with high ability, 504, ISP, and IEP accommodations.
- Prepared standard-based educational objectives and lessons while adhering to individualized education plans and common core standards.
- Introduced service-learning opportunities that formed partnerships with community individuals and organizations.
- Developed and facilitate professional development training for school faculty on numerous technology issues.
- Conducted research on current practices regarding technology use and familiarity in our school.
- Served as the Social Studies Chair and Technology Committee Chair. A member of the Discipline Committee, EVSC Social Studies Curriculum Mapping Committee and the PL-221 School Improvement Committee.

PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

Association for Educational Communications & Technology (2015 – Present)
Online Learning Consortium (2014 – Present)
Association of American Educators, Member (2009 – Present)
International Society for Technology in Education (2011 – Present)
Kentucky Society for Technology in Education (2016 – Present)
Indiana State Teachers Association, Member (2005 – 2013)
Indiana Council for Economics Education, Member (2005-2013)

PRESENTATIONS

2016 Fall Institute: August 8-9, 2016. Advanced LMS Training: Your Learning Management System.

2015 Fall Institute: August 12-13, 2015. How Technology Can Improve the Learning Experience?

2014 Fall Institute: August 13-14, 2014. Integrating a Learning Management System to Facilitate a Face-To-Face Learning Environment.

2014 Staff Retreat: July 29, 2014. An Introduction to Online Education.

2013 ERevolution: Regional e-Learning Conference. July 10-11, 2013. *The Blended Classroom*

2012 Back to School Workshop: August 16, 2012. *Digital Tools in the Classroom*

2012 Back to School Workshop: August 17, 2012. Digital Citizenship for Educators

2011 Community of Digital Educators Kickoff: November 6, 2011. Web 2.0 Tools for Teachers.

2011 Faculty Inservice: October 11, 2011. Course Webpages: How a course website can improve achievement and communication?

2011 Faculty Inservice: September 12, 2011. All Things Angel: An introduction to your LMS.

COURSES TAUGHT

Edu 246 Technology Application and Integration in Education
Edu 340 Teaching Secondary School Subjects
Edu 416 Practicum - Middle School
Edu 417 Practicum – Secondary
Edu 435 Clinical Practice: Middle School (5-9)
Edu 436 Clinical Practice: Secondary (8-12)
Psy 370 Educational Psychology
BU 101 First Year Experience